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ISABEL MADE NO ANSWER, BUT CAPTAIN LYSAGHT SAW THE TIGHTENED CLASP OF HER TREMBLING HAND.

LOVE THE CONQUERER.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER L

"My dear Lysaght, welcome back to England!"

The person thus addressed was a tall, handsome man of about five-and-thirty years of age. His features were a somewhat proud expression, yet in no way repelled one, and his bearing, though imposing, was singularly easy. He turned at the above greeting, and heartily shook the hand held out to him.

"My dear Charteris, I am delighted to see you again."

"Are you coming my way?" asked Charteris, a good-looking fellow in the Carabiners—the two men had met in Piccadilly. "Walk with me to my rooms," he continued, "I can't lose you so soon. Good Heavens! how time has flown. It is eight years, is it not, since you were in England?"

"Nearly nice."

"And, pray, may I ask when you were going to look me up?"

"You can't think I had forgotten you, Arthur; but I was not well enough to do anything the first few weeks after my return, and I have been staying down at my brother's place."

"Ah! I forgot you were on sick leave. How are you now?"

"Much better, thanks; I have picked up wonderfully."

"Why do you not exchange if the climate does not agree with you?"

"Oh, it agrees with me very well; I had not a day's illness till I was knocked over by this fever. I shall be quite fit to return in a year's time, at the expiration of my leave."

"You don't seem at all anxious to remain over here, Claude."

"My dear fellow," returned Lysaght, with a slight, sad smile, that made him look handsomer still, "so many changes take place in a few years, so many of the old moorings are cut away. I feel terribly out of it all."

"Nonsense, you will soon get in the swing again; you have arrived in time for all the

gaieties. I shall take you to Lady Luxmore's to-night."

"I don't know that I feel up to it, Arthur."

"You need only look in for an hour; you will meet several old friends. Come home and dine with me, and I will send my man for your things, so that we can go together. Here we are at my place."

The invitation was accepted, and half-an-hour later the two friends were seated over their tête-à-tête dinner.

"I must introduce you to Miss Villiers to-night, Claude," said Charteris. "Of course you have heard of her?"

"I knew her father slightly before I went out to India. I hear she is a great beauty, though, from all accounts, a somewhat capricious one."

"Well, it is hardly to be wondered at; with her beauty and wealth she can rule society pretty well as she chooses. Take care, old man, you do not lose your heart."

"No fear of that," replied Lysaght, confidently, as he leaned back in his chair and stroked his long, golden moustache.

"Lady Clara Vere de Vere, of me you shall

not win renown," quoted Charteris, laughing. "Is that what you mean?"

"Well, I flatter myself I am not susceptible, and am in no position to allow myself to be so. However, surrounded as Miss Villiers is by more distinguished admirers, she would scarcely think it worth her while to waste her fascinations on me."

"Proud humility," returned Charteris, with an amused glance at his friend's handsome, high-bred face; "let me tell you she thinks everyone worth her while."

"In fact, I suppose she is utterly heartless."

"No, no," replied Charteris, "it would be hard indeed to believe that anyone so beautiful could be that. Perhaps we are rather to be despised for being so easily conquered and made wretched by a lovely face."

"I should think you can scarcely have been made the latter," replied his friend, "or you could not defend her. I am glad of it, for I think it a shame that a vain, frivolous girl should have the power to mar the happiness of so many."

"You are severe on the fair Isabel," returned Arthur Charteris; "but, to tell you the truth, though I was rather hard hit at first, I have since seen a face I like better. However, we won't discuss her any more, or you will be prejudiced before seeing her; wait till then to judge, for no man condemns on hearsay. Now, tell me, have you heard anything of Langley, of the —th?" And thereupon they fell to discussing old days and old friends till it was time to present themselves at Lady Luxmore's in Grosvenor-square.

It was rather late when they entered the crowded ball-room. Lady Luxmore greeted the two friends with great empressement, and Lysaght had scarcely escaped from her overpowering politeness when he was eagerly seized upon by several old friends, delighted to see him again, for though with women he was always somewhat distant and reserved with men he was a general favourite.

His hostess, however, allowed him little leisure for idle converse; she captured him again, and introduced him to a young lady for the waltz just commencing; and Lysaght, not wishing to pose as an invalid, found he must exert himself to do his part in the evening's dissipation.

At the close of the dance, when he had consigned his partner to the care of her chaperone, he was cast by Charteris.

"Come and be introduced to the star of the evening," said the latter. "Have you seen her?"

"I have not looked for her," was Lysaght's indifferent reply.

Charteris smiled, but did not answer. With difficulty they made their way through the crowd to one of the ante-rooms which led off from the ball-room, and where Isabel Villiers was holding a brilliant court.

When Lysaght's glance fell on her he could not but own that for once report had not been exaggerated. What a lovely face it was! how perfect in feature and colouring! The exquisitely moulded mouth and chin, the delicately arched brow, the large violet eyes shaded by long curling lashes, all combined to form a picture of rare beauty. Her rich dress of white satin set off to perfection the graceful outlines of her figure, as she sat there leaning back in her low chair, negligently toying with her fan of ostrich feathers, a dreamy smile circling her lips, while she listened to the flatteries of her *corps d'élite*.

"Miss Villiers," said Charteris, going up to her, "allow me to introduce to you a great friend of mine, Captain Lysaght."

She glanced round, and turning on them her beautiful eyes made a graceful acknowledgment to Claude's bow. Of course he solicited the honour of a dance with her, and she graciously accorded him her first disengaged waltz.

"May I hope to be equally fortunate, Miss Villiers?" said Charteris. "I am sure you owe me some amends for my disappointment of last night. How is it you were not at Mrs. Tremaine's?"

"Miss Villiers was no doubt favouring some

more fortunate individuals," said another man standing by; "we must not presume to question her."

"Pardon me if I have been indiscreet," laughed Charteris, "but you cannot be surprised if we are anxious as to your movements, and you always leave us in all the agonies of suspense."

"You do not look as though your health were giving way under the strain," said Miss Villiers, lightly.

"This is our dance, Miss Villiers," said Lord Delamere, one of the group, offering her his arm.

"You will surely reserve a waltz for me, will you not?" said Charteris; as she passed him, "you cannot be so hard-hearted as to refuse."

"I shall see," she replied, but nevertheless giving him a very engaging smile.

Later in the evening Lysaght went to claim her as his partner. Both were perfect dancers, and Miss Villiers gave herself up to the enjoyment of her waltz, and did not at first seek to enter into conversation.

At the conclusion of the dance they went into the conservatory, and, after giving her a seat, Lysaght proceeded to make himself comfortable in a low garden chair by her side.

There was silence between them for a few minutes.

Claude was, to all intent, deeply engaged in pulling a rose to pieces, and Isabel lazily fanned herself and studied her companion's countenance from beneath her long, veiling lashes.

She noted the handsome features, with their reserved expression, the proud lines round the firm mouth; and, quick at reading people's characters, she discerned that this was a different nature to those that usually crossed her path.

His coldness, so different from the ready admiration she always received, half piqued, half pleased her, for it would be the greater triumph to subjugate him.

Suddenly he looked up, and vexed that he should have caught her observing him, her colour deepened, and for the first time in her life she felt embarrassed, as the steady gaze of his dark eyes met hers.

"You must be glad to have returned to England, after so long an absence, Captain Lysaght," she began, somewhat abruptly.

"For some reasons I am," he replied.

"Would it be presumptuous to inquire into them?" she asked with winning grace.

"Well, in the first place, I have some very great friends here."

"And such things are scarce, are they not?" said Isabel, laughing.

"I should have thought you would be the last person to say so," he rejoined, quietly.

"Why so, pray?"

"Because one so universally admired as Miss Villiers would scarcely be supposed to be in want of friends."

Isabel laughed softly.

"You have not forgotten how to pay compliments during your residence in India, Captain Lysaght. Let me tell you they are what I particularly dislike."

"You must be used to them, Miss Villiers!"

"So used that they fail to gratify," she answered, somewhat coldly.

He raised his dark eyes and looked at her scrutinizingly.

"Yet I venture to think you would miss them if you have none addressed to you."

"What makes you say so?" she asked, impatiently. "Are you one of those men who imagine women incapable of serious or intellectual conversation?"

"By no means, only I think it a pity women sometimes pervert their gifts."

"Do you think I pervert mine?" she asked, with an arch smile.

Any other man would have been vanquished by the bewitching glance of those beautiful eyes, but Claude was determined to steal himself against her.

"The shortness of our acquaintance will not

warrant my giving an opinion on the subject," he answered, gravely.

A faint flush rose to Isabel's cheek. His indifference chafed her; she felt a sudden unaccountable longing to win this man's good opinion.

"When we know each other better I shall come to you for an answer," she said, gaily, striving to hide her discomfiture; "but in the meanwhile you must promise not to listen to any of my enemies, or they may prejudice you against me."

"You ought not to have any enemies, Miss Villiers."

"No!" said Isabel, with delicate scorn. "You think it presumptuous to claim the privilege only accorded to great people!"

"Nay, I have heard that Miss Villiers is a great power in that most important arena, London Society."

"How sarcastic you are!"

"I did not mean to be so," he returned, so gravely that she could not help laughing.

"And your spell to disarm enmity?" she asked.

"Use that power leniently; as you are strong, be merciful."

"Are you pleading for yourself, or for others?"

As she asked the question she bent slightly towards him. The lovely violet eyes gleamed on him with seductive softness; a faint, dreamy smile played round the delicate lips; the wax-light fell on her golden hair, and flashed a myriad colour from the diamonds in her shell-like ears and round her white throat; the faint, sweet perfume of the roses in her dress reached him where he sat, and seemed to enthral his senses. The subtle fascination she exercised over all began to make itself felt by Lysaght, and angry with himself for even momentarily yielding to it he rose somewhat abruptly, and answered coldly,—

"Nay, I was not thinking of myself."

An unpardonably uncourteous speech to address to a beauty, and a queen of society, as Lysaght felt the moment he had uttered it. The girl drew back, her face paled somewhat; never in all her courted life had words such as these been spoken to her. Ere he had time to make amends for them a young man approached to claim her for the ensuing dance. Isabel rose at once, and making Lysaght a graceful inclination returned to the ball room.

Her last dance before leaving she gave to Charteris. The latter turned the conversation on his friend, and it was pleasant to hear the warm way in which he spoke of him.

"I am so glad he is back in England. I only wish he were going to remain longer. He was always my greatest chum; we have known each other since we were boys. He is a capital dancer, is he not, Miss Villiers?"

"Yes. Is that his chief recommendation?"

"What an unkind speech, but I thought it was what you would be most competent to judge of during your brief acquaintance."

"Certainly, I did not mean to hurt your feelings. Captain Lysaght was certainly right when he said he had some warm friends in England. And now I must be going. I see Miss Singleton in the distance, looking for me."

She rose as she spoke, and Charteris gave her his arm to conduct her downstairs. In the hall they came across Lysaght.

"Captain Lysaght," said Isabel as the good-nights were being spoken at the carriage-door, "you know my father, I believe! We shall hope to see you shortly in Lowndes-square."

"Thank you, I shall do myself the honour of calling soon," he replied, bowing with his grave courtesy, and with another gay nod from Isabel the carriage drove off.

"Well, my dear, have you had a pleasant evening?" asked Mrs. Singleton, in her quiet voice.

She was a distant connection of Sir Henry Villiers, and resided with them in the capacity of chaperone to Isabel.

"Oh! fairly so," replied the girl, as she nestled back among her furs; "but, after all,

there is a great sameness in these things, and they begin to pall on one after a time."

"What, Isabel, you begin to moralize?"

Isabel did not answer, she closed her eyes and feigned sleep, but her thoughts were busy. She did not know that it was the grave glance of a pair of dark eyes that made her feel momentarily disatisfied with herself.

"Have a care, Captain Lysaght," she mused; "you have challenged me, and shall yet feel my power. The day will come when you will plead for yourself, and not for others."

CHAPTER II.

FROM her earliest years Isabel Villiers had been accustomed to have her every wish gratified. An only child, she had lost her mother at a very early age, and her father was an indolent, careless man, little fitted for the responsibility that devolved on him. As for exercising any control over her that would have been far too much trouble, and Mrs. Singleton was of too yielding a disposition to possess any degree of influence with her, though there existed a great affection between them.

Hence the girl grew up with her pride and love of power unchecked. When she went into society had great beauty and fascination, as well as her wealth—for Sir Henry Villiers was reputed to be possessed of vast riches—made her queen of the circle in which she moved. She had many brilliant offers, but she had not yet loved well enough to yield her will to another. With her high spirit she would have chafed at control, especially if exercised by one who had no hold on her affection.

The afternoon on which we take up the thread of our story she was sitting alone in her boudoir in a somewhat listless attitude. Her book had fallen from her fingers, and she lay back, gazing dreamily out of window.

A month had elapsed since Lady Luxmore's dance; the season was in full swing. Morning parties, dinners, balls, concerts were the order of the day. Isabel and Lysaght met constantly in the gyration of London life, and she had spared no pains to fascinate him, though, as yet, he gave her no proof that her efforts were successful. This added all the more zest to the task, and she felt it would be a signal victory indeed should she conquer him, and see those grave eyes soften with love for her. She gave no thought that the attainment of her wish might be fraught with suffering to herself, that her own heart might be ensnared in seeking to subjugate his.

She was roused from her reverie by a sharp knock at the door, and looking round, to her surprise, saw her father enter the room.

Sir Henry gave his daughter little of his society, and never intruded on her in this, her own particular sanctum. Between the two there was not much affection, and less sympathy, for Isabel could never quite fathom her father.

He was now about fifty years of age, and, no doubt, had been handsome in his youth, but there was that about him that did not prepossess one in his favour.

"I am not interrupting you in any way, I suppose?" he asked, as he wheeled forward an armchair for his use.

"Not at all," replied his daughter. She flung her book on the sofa by her side, and folded her white hands in her lap. "What have you so particular to say to me?"

Sir Henry smiled grimly.

"You are a clever girl, Isabel; I only wish you would use your cleverness to some purpose. How did you know I wished to speak to you particularly?"

"Because you would not otherwise have favoured me with your company here."

"Well, it is true I do wish to speak to you on an important topic. I should like to know when you intend to marry!"

"When I intend to marry?" said his daughter, turning her lovely eyes on him in mild surprise.

"Yes," returned Sir Henry, impatiently; "why need you repeat my words? Are they so strange?"

"They struck me as somewhat so," said Isabel, a provoking little smile dimpling her cheek. "You see, it requires two people to carry out an arrangement of that sort."

"You can easily find the other party to it," retorted her father. "Pray why have you refused Lord Delamere again?"

She drew herself rather haughtily at this questioning.

"I do not like him," she said, briefly.

"What romantic nonsense," sneered Sir Henry. "You have no objection to his rent-roll I presume?"

"None whatever, so long as I do not share it with him."

"You could spend it very well, I fancy. However, if he is not to your taste, there are others; you know you have but to say the word and you can have dozens of men at your feet."

Isabel looked down at her daintily-shod little feet, as though searching for those numerous supplicants.

"It sounds very flattering," she said, with a mischievous sparkle in her eyes, "but, poor things, they must find it very uncomfortable."

Sir Henry gave utterance to something that sounded very like an oath.

"I see nothing to just about," he said, savagely, "as you may find one day. It is well for you now, when you have it all your own way; but remember, young lady, you will not always be young, and fresh beauties may turn up to put you in the shade. Take my advice—choose while you may, and choose wisely."

"You mean sell myself to the highest bidder?" said Isabel, coldly.

"If you like to put it in that way. I think, however, your tastes will lead you to choose a wealthy husband."

"I was not aware that I should be beholden to my husband for everything."

"One never knows what may happen," returned Sir Henry. "I may as well tell you at once that I have had some rather heavy losses lately, so that I may not be able to do as much for you as I thought. And now I hope you will think over what I have said, for, believe me, you would do well to settle soon."

Sir Henry rose to go; he had said his say, and thought it wiser to retreat so as to avoid any further discussion. He had barely left the room when Mrs. Singleton entered, seemingly somewhat perturbed.

"I met your father just now," she said, in low tones, as though she feared Sir Henry might overhear her. "Has he been with you, my dear, and has anything occurred to vex him?"

"Merely the fact that I could not assign any fixed date for ridding him altogether of my society," answered Isabel.

"My dear! what do you mean?" asked Mrs. Singleton, looking perplexed.

Her office of chaperone to Miss Villiers was no sinecure. She was perpetually being worried by that young lady's caprices, and she was aware that each time an eligible suitor was rejected Sir Henry in part held her answerable.

"I mean what I say," returned Isabel. "My father is angry that there is no immediate prospect of my marrying."

"Well, dear, he must be disappointed at your refusing so many good offers," ventured Mrs. Singleton, mildly. "What are you waiting for, Isabel?"

The girl did not answer her. She rose impatiently from her seat. In some wise those words, uttered so unconsciously, stirred her strangely.

What was she waiting for? What was the reason of this feverish unrest and discontent that had of late possessed her?

She did not answer Mrs. Singleton's question, and there was a few minutes' silence, broken at length by Isabel.

"My father hinted at some money losses,"

she said. "Have you heard anything of the matter?"

"No, indeed; what did he say?"

"Oh, nothing much, and I believe, after all, it was merely a ruse on his part by which he thought to induce me sooner to marry."

No more could be said on the subject, for at this juncture the man-servant entered to inform Isabel that her horse was at the door, and she left the room to prepare for her ride.

It was a lovely afternoon, but she was out of spirits, and did not experience the usual enjoyment that riding always afforded her.

A splendid horsewoman, owning an irreproachable thoroughbred, Miss Villiers was a noticeable feature in the Row.

This afternoon her horse, always requiring a firm hand to control him, seemed unusually restive.

Once in the Park, on the soft, yielding turf, he became almost unmanageable, and Isabel perceived she would have to indulge him in a good canter before his superfluous spirits would be subdued.

Ere she could carry out her intention the horse suddenly reared, then with a plunge forward that tore the reins from her hands set off at a mad gallop.

She had entirely lost all control over him, but she managed to keep her seat. She knew well her danger—that at any moment she might be flung down unconscious beneath those iron hoofs, whose dull echoing thud was ringing in her ears, but she did not lose her presence of mind. Though deathly pale there was a look of fearless courage in her beautiful eyes.

On tore the horse, and they were nearing now the crowded part of the Row, she was growing giddy from the rapidity of the motion and the rush of air in her ears.

What would be the end? Involuntarily she shut her eyes and shuddered. Suddenly the horse stumbled and nearly fell, and ere it could regain its footing a dozen men rushed forward from the railings, surrounded him, and seized the reins.

Saved!

A thrill of intense thankfulness stirred Isabel's heart as she drew the reins again through her trembling fingers, and graciously bowed her thanks to her preservers, who were full of admiration at her quiet self-command.

At that moment a well-known voice spoke her name. She started and looked round. Lysaght was at her side.

"Can I be of any service to you, Miss Villiers?" he asked, in tones far different to those in which he always addressed her.

His face was pale, his manner, for a man usually so calm, very disturbed. The sound of his voice seemed to unnerve her somewhat.

She tried to answer, but her lips quivered, and, ashamed of her emotion, she bent her head to hide it, and pretended to be engaged in arranging the reins. But her agitation did not escape him unobserved.

"Do you feel equal to remaining on horseback?" he continued, gently.

"Perfectly so," she answered, trying to speak lightly. "There is nothing more to fear. 'Wild Fire' will not serve me so again. I can't tell what ailed him," and she stooped and patted the horse's beautiful glossy neck.

"Then you must allow me the pleasure of seeing you home," he said. "I should feel uneasy about you if I did not."

"Thank you, you are very kind," she said, softly.

The groom now rode up; he was quite pale from fright, and was immensely relieved to find his mistress uninjured. At Isabel's request he dismounted and Lysaght took his place. The young couple were very silent during the ride to Lowndes-square, but the thoughts of both were busy.

"I shall see you this evening," she said, when they reached the house. "Thank you for your kindness."

"You have nothing to thank me for, Miss Villiers. I only wish I could have rendered you more effectual assistance," he returned, earnestly

and his tone made her heart throb with a feeling new to her.

On leaving Isabel Captain Lysaght returned to his rooms, where he spent the remainder of the afternoon a prey to most disturbing thoughts.

Long ere this he had discovered that though he was not susceptible he had yet a heart to lose, and that Isabel Villiers reigned there supreme.

Had he had any doubt on the subject that afternoon when he had seen her in danger, himself powerless to aid her, his eyes would have been open to the truth.

He had been so sure of himself that he had not thought it necessary to steal himself against her, and when he began to fear that their intercourse might be fraught with danger to his peace of mind it was too late to avail.

He called himself by many hard names, and strove heartily to cure himself of what he termed his folly; but all to no purpose; one glance at Isabel's perfect face overthrew all his resolutions.

He was aware he might be laying up for himself a large store of misery. He had heard how she sometimes encouraged only to reject, that she had refused most wealthy alliances; how was it possible she would listen to him, a man with such limited means; and in fancy he beheld the beautiful eyes flash with scorn did he ask her to share his uncertain fortunes.

Yet at times, when the spell of her presence was on him, he could scarcely restrain the words of love that rushed to his lips; the thought of her wealth alone stayed him, for he could not bear to be regarded as a fortune-hunter.

He had great self-control, and, as has been shown, had as yet most successfully concealed his real feelings. He sought to avoid her, to withdraw himself entirely from the fascination of her presence, for he resolved that he would never ask Isabel Villiers to be his wife till he was more her equal in worldly riches.

CHAPTER III.

ISABEL, meanwhile, was feeling somewhat unbound by the afternoon's adventure, more so, she told herself, than the nature of it at all warranted. But she was not, by any means, one to encourage undue sensitiveness, and when, an hour later, she entered the drawing-room, it was with her usual stately step and composed demeanour.

Mrs. Singleton hurried in shortly after, having heard of the occurrence through Isabel's maid.

"It was only last week I told you I never feel happy when you are out riding," she said.

"I am afraid, then, you cannot have a very blissful existence, you poor creature," laughed Isabel.

"If only you would not ride such dreadful horses," sighed her chaperone.

"Pray don't stigmatize my beautiful Wild Fire as a dreadful horse! I am afraid, dear, I could not give him up even to please you."

At this moment the door was thrown open, and Miss Chichester was announced.

Isabel went hastily forward to meet the newcomer, a fair, slight girl, with one of those pure, Madonna-like faces which are so irresistibly winning.

Eva Chichester was the only girl for whom Isabel entertained any genuine friendship, her very dissimilarity of character, perhaps, proving the attraction. Eva, on her side, had a blind adoration for her friend; herself too pretty and too admired to have cause for jealousy, even if this failing had not been wholly incompatible with her loving, unselfish nature, she looked on Isabel as the personification of beauty and cleverness.

"I am so glad to see you again, dear!" she said, as she embraced the latter. "I thought yesterday I should not be able to come up to town, for mamma was not quite so well."

"It is too bad having to lose so much of the season," said Isabel; "but you always bear unpleasant things well, Eva. However, I am very glad not to be deprived of your company this evening, and so, I think, will be a certain gentleman whom I expect."

"Whom do you mean, Isabel?" asked Eva, though by the flush that mounted to her brow it would seem she intuitively guessed.

"You dear little hypocrite," returned Isabel, with the low musical laugh that was one of her greatest attractions, "as though you don't know. You have never heard, I suppose, of a certain gallant captain of the Carabiniers who takes more than a passing interest in your movements. He has been looking very dejected of late, it is generally said, owing to your absence."

"That is your nonsense, Isa, dear," returned the young girl, a soft colour deepening in her cheeks.

"Is it? Well, I won't argue the matter with you. I doubt but that he will be able, ere long, to convince you of the truth of my assertion. In the meanwhile—here he is," she broke off in a low tone, as Captain Charteris and Captain Lysaght were announced.

There was no time for particular conversation; other guests were announced, and Isabel had to dispense her attentions generally. In her character of hostess she always showed to perfection her ease, her high-bred grace, her inimitable tact and *savoir faire* made her unrivalled on such occasions.

This evening, however, it all seemed an effort to her; an unaccountable depression weighed on her, and she felt she must be enacting her part very indifferently, little guessing that to one present her manner seemed more attractive than ever from the slight languor that pervaded it. Lysaght, in truth, was rapidly forgetting all his good resolutions, and feeling that happiness and peace of mind were worth staking for the chance of winning her.

When the ladies returned to the drawing-room Isabel for the moment relaxed her guard over herself, and sank into an armchair in a weary, dispirited manner. But she was not suffered to remain unmolested.

Among the ladies present was Lady Luxmore, a rather pretty young woman with soft, sleepy ways, and an ever-ready smile, one of those women who say the most disagreeable things in a seemingly pleasant manner.

She had a special grudge against Isabel, to whom it was well-known that Lord Luxmore had proposed before offering his hand to her, and this knowledge being intensely galling to her she never let slip an opportunity of injuring her former rival.

On the present occasion she quietly ensconced herself in an easy chair at Isabel's side, and said in her sweetest voice, and with her most alluring smile,—

"How very variable your spirits are, my dear Miss Villiers; no one could recognize you for the brilliant talker of a few moments ago. Of course with men one has to exert oneself so much more. It is not necessary to put forth our powers of attractions when we women are alone, is it? But perhaps you are not feeling well; you are looking very pale. Really I am quite anxious about you."

"You are too kind," replied Isabel, coldly, for needless to say, on her side she possessed a strong antipathy to Lady Luxmore. "I think I may relieve your mind of all uneasiness on my behalf. I am merely rather tired from the afternoon's occurrence."

"Ah, to be sure; you were dreadfully alarmed, were you not? At least so Captain Lysaght said when he told me about it."

It may be advisable here to remark that Lady Luxmore did not always think it necessary to speak the truth. She was an adept in the art of twisting and colouring a simple statement, till it would assume altogether another significance to that which was intended—a most dangerous propensity, so true is it—

"That a lie which is all a lie, can be met and fought with outright;

But a lie which is half a truth, is a harder matter to fight."

Isabel vouchsafed no reply to her remark; she continued fanning herself in an apparently unconcerned way.

"By-the-bye," continued her ladyship, studying her hostess's face from under her drooping

lids, "what do you think of him, dear? He is very handsome, is he not!—but such a cold, haughty manner, and he is a perfect woman-hater, I am told. Why he actually remains impervious to your attractions, which proves he must be of adamant. I admire the sweet way in which you try to charm him, but were I you I would not waste my time on such an ungrateful object. What do you think I heard him say of you? But there, I ought not to repeat it, I shall hurt your feelings."

Isabel's lip curled with scorn.

"My feelings are not so easily hurt, Lady Luxmore, and it is quite indifferent to me what Captain Lysaght thinks of me."

"I was sure of that," said Lady Luxmore, smiling sweetly. "As though the courted Isabel Villiers would bestow her favour on a penniless captain. But just to warn you against the man, I will tell you. Well, then, dear, I heard Captain Lysaght say to some friends of his that he considered you perfectly heartless."

Another instance of Lady Luxmore's clever manipulation of the truth. She had chanced to be present when Captain Lysaght was defending Isabel against some animadversions of her friends, and she overheard Charteris say to him, "I told you that once you had seen Miss Villiers you would no longer be inclined to say she must be perfectly heartless."

By grossly altering and misrepresenting the whole affair she was able to make it serve her purpose, namely, that of mortifying Isabel, though whether she had succeeded in her endeavour she had not the satisfaction of ascertaining, for the look of indifference on the beautiful face by her side never changed.

"Must he not be a wretch!" she continued, in no way daunted by Isabel's silence. "But I said to Lord Luxmore that no one who knew you would believe it, and that it was quite painful to me to hear such things said of you."

"I can quite understand that your affection for me must have made it very painful to you to listen to such an opinion of me," replied Isabel, with such cutting irony that Lady Luxmore, irrepressible as she was, was for the moment silenced, and before she could recover herself Isabel rose, and, crossing the room, seated herself by Lina.

Though outwardly unmoved, her heart was throbbing with mortified pride and wounded feeling. He had called her heartless! He had spoken of her slightly to others, who were perhaps too ready to endorse his sentiments.

Lady Luxmore would indeed have been gratified could she have guessed the bitter thoughts caused by her spiteful words.

The gentlemen made their appearance shortly after, and music and singing followed. Isabel was careful not to appear to avoid Lysaght, as her inclination prompted, so anxious was she to prove to Lady Luxmore her indifference to her taunts, and he on his side devoted himself chiefly to her, his previous coldness of demeanour almost entirely banished.

At length the evening drew to a close. Lysaght, Charteris, and Eva were the last to leave, and as the two latter were taking a very lengthy farewell of each other the former stood a little apart with Isabel.

"Shall I meet you at Mrs. Canning's to-morrow evening?" he asked, his dark eyes fixed so earnestly on her that against her will her own drooped, and her colour deepened somewhat.

"I believe so," she replied, negligently, angry with herself that he should have the power to move her in any way.

"And you will reserve me some dances, I hope?" he continued, persuasively, as he took her hand preparative to bidding her good night. He had seen those slight signs of embarrassment, and they filled him with sudden hope. The next moment, however, she withdrew her hand, and looked up with laughing, unclouded eyes.

"I never make rash promises. Captain Lysaght; my moods are too variable for me to bind myself by such."

A mortified look crossed his face, and he wished her good-bye with a return of his cold manner.

How rejoiced was Isabel when at length she

gained the solitude of her own room. She speedily dismissed her maid, and throwing a light wrapper round her, she sat far into the night seeking to wrestle with this new pain at her heart.

By the tumult of feeling roused in her by Lady Luxmore's words she knew the truth at last; the veil was torn from her eyes—she loved Claude Lysaght.

In trying to win his heart she had surrendered her own; she, who had hitherto sported with affection, had disdained and disregarded it, had to bow beneath a power stronger than her own.

And she loved, as she imagined, in vain; that thought was bitter humiliation to her. Could it be that she, for whose favour men sighed, for whose smiles men sued, had suffered herself to be won without being wooed?

CHAPTER IV

THE London season was wearing to its close. July had commenced, and the votaries of fashion were already thinking of leaving town, and were making plans for the ensuing months.

Tired by the heat of the London drawing-rooms, and the unceasing round of gaieties, they began to sigh after the fresh sea-breezes and the green country lanes.

Many of the fair sex were looking somewhat pale, the late hours making sad havoc in their beauty.

Isabel Villiers, however, who seemed to possess a fund of unquenchable vitality, was as bright and lovely as ever.

She still wielded, undisputed, her sceptre as Queen of Beauty; her conquests were as numerous as ever, and she had at length the satisfaction of knowing that she was successful in the one on which she had once resolved, that of Claude Lysaght.

That gallant officer had indeed by now wholly given up the struggle with his feelings; and though he spoke no words of love, it was evident to all that he was her devoted slave.

As to how it was to end he rarely let himself think. Encouraged sometimes by the unwonted gentleness of her manner he would indulge in wild hopes; again, when her mood changed, he told himself that she was merely striving to prove her power over him as over all others, and that it was impossible she could ever be his wife.

Isabel, meanwhile, was passing through an experience new to her. Though from her bringing up and her surroundings she was worldly and capricious, hers was not a nature to love lightly, and she was conscious at times that she was willing to resign all her ambitious hopes for his sake, and to make that most foolish mistake in the eyes of the world—a bad match.

Her manner, influenced as it was by her conflicting feelings, was such as sorely to try an ardent lover.

Captain Lysaght's attentions to Miss Villiers were, as we have said, remarked by all, and formed an endless theme of conjecture and surprise.

The women were mildly disdainful, although he gave himself such airs, they said, he was as easily taken by a pretty face as any of the others.

The men in their turn were somewhat resentful at the favour in which he seemed held; it was too bad of him to come home and cut them all out.

Of course he was well aware what a good thing he would be doing for himself, for in time he would get all the Villiers' money.

Strange that one can be so seldom credited with disinterested conduct or generous motives!

It was this view of the case that was so galling to Claude's pride, the more so as he knew he was entirely free from all mercenary motives; and when led on by Isabel's beauty and fascinations he felt inclined to risk all, and tell her of his love, the thought that she, too, might suppose that her fortune had charms for him sufficed to check the words that rose to his lips.

One afternoon, when at Charteris's rooms, a brother officer of the latter, a Captain Templeton, came in.

The object of his visit was to congratulate Charteris, who was now engaged to Eva Chichester, that young lady being at length convinced of the true state of his feelings towards her.

"You are a lucky fellow, Charteris," said Templeton, as he seated himself, and followed the example of his friends by lighting a cigar. "Miss Chichester is as nice a girl as any man could wish to win."

Charteris looked disdainful at such cool praise. Templeton laughed.

"What have you are, Arthur! If I were to go into ecstasies over her you would imagine directly I was in love with her myself. And he would soon have me out then, would he not, Lysaght?"

"I don't know," replied Claude, smiling. "I rather fancy he would think it quite excusable."

"And she will have a neat little sum of her own, I believe," pursued Templeton. "It's always satisfactory when the young lady's 'face' is not her only fortune. It's all very well to talk about love, but in these expensive times one needs something more substantial."

"Your sentiments do you credit," said Lysaght, with a slight touch of irony in his voice. "When I hear of any young couple about to marry imprudently as regards money I shall feel inclined to send for you to admonish them."

"Now, you may be able to point to yourself as an example of my theory," returned the other, "for you will be doing a very creditable thing if you can win Miss Villiers. You will have plenty of the needful there, although they do say that Sir Henry is not as well off as he lays claim to be. I knew you were not the man to be caught by mere beauty only, and you seem to have a better chance than any of us in that quarter. Let me know when all is settled, and I'll be magnanimous enough to offer my services as best man."

"I do not understand you," returned Lysaght, haughtily, as a man will do when another, however intimate he may be, touches too closely on his private affairs.

There are limits we cannot endure our nearest and dearest friends to pass; we may volunteer them any confidence, but for them unasked to seek to discover the secrets of our hearts will make us involuntarily draw back within ourselves.

"Then you must be unusually obtuse, my dear fellow," pursued Templeton, in a provoking tone, for he liked to ruffle Lysaght's haughty serenity. "You must know people say that you are going in for the Villiers' money!"

"People talk a great deal too much of what they know nothing about," returned Lysaght, an angry flush rising to his brow; "it is a pity everyone is not left to manage their own affairs."

"You are quite right, though you won't get them to think so. People do, and always will, meddle with other people's concerns, and you won't alter things unless you reform society altogether, a task I advise you not to undertake, my dear fellow. For the rest, I assure you, I intended no offence, and was merely repeating an old *dit de société*."

"You might have saved yourself the trouble," replied Claude, with cold contempt, "for the *on dit de société* do not interest me."

"*On dit* are fools' newspapers," quoted Charteris.

"Thanks, old man, you are polite," laughed Templeton, as he rose to leave; "but for all that there are wise men not above being annoyed by them. And now I must be off," he continued, feigning not to notice the indignant flush in Lysaght's eyes. "I have an appointment at the club. I shall see you both later on, no doubt," and, with a careless nod, he lounged out of the room.

"Templeton, what possessed you to be so provoking!" said Charteris, as he followed his friend to the head of the stairs.

Templeton gave a low *maléfique* laugh.

"I love to tease Lysaght," he answered; "especially when he puts on his *not me tangere* air. Confound it, my dear Arthur, why should he look for a more charitable view of his actions than the rest of his neighbours?"

By which remark it will be seen that Captain Templeton was essentially "of the world, worldly."

"Don't let yourself be annoyed by Templeton's remarks," said Charteris, when he returned to the room. "He is provoking at times, but he's not a bad fellow on the whole!"

"I daresay not, if he were not so utterly selfish and calculating," returned Lysaght, with supreme disdain.

"As to that, it is difficult to find an utterly unselfish person," said Charteris, as he dropped lazily into his easy chair.

"No doubt you fully coincide with all Templeton's views!" answered Lysaght, stiffly.

Charteris looked at him in surprise.

"Why, Claude, what has come to you? You are surely not going to quarrel with your old friend?"

Lysaght held out his hand, a softer expression stealing over his features.

"Forgive me, Charteris," he said, gently. "I know I am in an awfully savage humour to-day, but when one hears such hateful interested motives ascribed to one it is enough to make one so."

"I am afraid you are not so utterly indifferent to the *on dit* as you pretend to be, Claude," returned Charteris, with a smile.

Lysaght rose abruptly, and began to pace the room with hasty, impatient steps.

"Arthur," he said, "I think it very generous of you not to taunt me with the concealed boast I made that first evening we met, when I think how weak I have proved myself. I am a fool, indeed, to have suffered myself to care for that girl, for I shall never ask her to be my wife. I might have known what construction the world would place on my conduct."

"My dear fellow, let the world be hanged, and follow your own heart. If the girl believes in you is not that enough?"

"Ah, it is easy enough for a rich fellow like you to talk; but you don't know how hurtful it is to one's pride to be regarded as a mere fortune-hunter."

"How seldom are anyone's motives rightly construed by the world," said Charteris. "Loving Miss Villiers as you do I should certainly tell her of your feelings towards her."

"Do you think it likely that a girl brought up as she has been would listen to me for a moment?"

"Girls are incomprehensible puzzles my dear Claude. Miss Villiers has had plenty of good offers which she has thought fit to reject. She may be tempted, perhaps, to entertain a bad one, for I do not think she is indifferent to you."

"If only she were not so wealthy!" sighed Lysaght. "I could not bear for her to suspect me."

"Then her fortune is all that prevents you speaking?"

"Yes."

Charteris sat regarding his friend for some moments meditatively.

"Suppose," he said, slowly, "you knew that she would have but little money, that she was in trouble, should you come forward?"

"You are promising an impossible contingencies," replied Lysaght, somewhat impatiently.

"I am not so sure. Listen, Claude. I am going to tell you, in strict confidence, something that has lately come to my knowledge. I learnt it by chance, and I should not mention it to anyone else, but if it will serve as an encouragement to you it will do no harm, for I know I can rely on your not letting the matter go farther. You heard what Templeton said just now about Sir Henry. Was it the first mention of the kind that has reached you?"

"No; but I merely treated it as an idle rumour."

"It is not such. Lysaght, if Sir Henry

Villiers cannot tide over a pressing difficulty he is a ruined man."

Lysaght started forward in amazement.

"Impossible!" he ejaculated.

"So I should have thought, but we never know the other side of the cards. I will tell you how I gained my information, which, like you, I should scarcely have credited had it been told me by a third person. You know how my young brother Fred has got into difficulties, do you not? Well, my father would not assist him again, and though I did what I could for him it was but a drop in the ocean. The upshot of it was that he had to go to the money-lenders, and pretty hard terms they drove with him. Last week I went to the principal one, to see how I could arrange matters for him. I was informed on my arrival at his office that Mr. Fenton was engaged with a gentleman, and I was shown into a room alone to await his leisure. It was an awfully hot day, and I threw up the window to its full height, and sat down by it. Mr. Fenton was evidently holding a *table à tête* in the adjacent room, for voices reached me through the open window. A bad practice, evidently, old fellow, to have interviews with your creditors in the summer time; it does not suffice for them to be with closed doors only."

"At first I heard nothing distinctly, for, as you may well understand, I was not listening; but at length the parties grew excited, and raised their voices, so that it was impossible for me, unless I was struck with sudden deafness, to avoid gathering something of what was passing. 'I am sure, Sir Henry,' I heard old Fenton saying, 'that you cannot complain of want of consideration. I really cannot put off the settlement of our accounts any longer. Months ago you said you would be able to arrange matters.'

"'And so I should but for my ill-luck at Epsom,' and imagine my astonishment when I recognized Sir Henry Villiers's voice, 'but I shall retrieve matters next week, I am sure, and if you will only listen to me quietly for a few moments you will see it will be better for you in every way to delay closing my account.'

"I did not hear any more, and I really felt quite guilty in having learnt so much. When old Fenton came into me he discoursed largely of the foolish way in which gentlemen ruin their prospects in life, and then desire to retrieve them on their own terms.

"'I will not mention names,' said the old hypocrite, 'but I have just had with me a gentleman who has dissipated an enormous fortune in a most reckless manner, and yet thinks himself most hardly done by because he has now to bear the consequences of his folly.'

"So you see, old man," finished up Charteris, as he filled himself a sparkling goblet of champagne, being considerably exhausted by his long narration, "Miss Villiers's fortune need not be an impediment, as it is improbable that she will have a very considerable one, if any at all. Take my advice and speak to her without delay, and if she thinks it's her money you want, why then she's not worthy of you."

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Lysaght left Charteris's rooms his hopes were considerably heightened; he might yet win her. Trouble and reverses threatened her, and his love might shield her from all.

Yes, he would follow his friend's counsel and speak without delay, for when Sir Henry's position became known it would be seen that his motives were disinterested.

He met Isabel out that evening at a dance, and certainly her manner to him was encouraging. She must love him, he told himself; those looks, those smiles, could not merely be a snare.

"You told me you would not be here to-night," she said to him in the pauses of a waltz.

"I could not resist the temptation of seeing you," he replied, in low, earnest tones, as he turned on her his speaking dark eyes.

Here fell beneath his glance, but she laughed softly. "I thought you could resist temptation

of all kinds. Captain Lysaght, I am disappointed in you."

"Are you? I am sorry to hear it," he answered, as though she had spoken seriously.

"Even before I knew you I was told you had such great force of character," she continued, mirthfully.

"Do you believe all you are told?"

"How you turn the tables on one," she returned, laughing. "Believe all that I am told? I should think not; I am afraid there is no one I trust enough to believe in."

"How I pity you," was his grave reply.

She flushed at his earnest tone, but nevertheless answered carelessly.

"You take everything *au stricto*, Captain Lysaght. I must really take heed of what I say. And now let us have some air to refresh us; the heat is really overpowering."

Claude pushed back the curtains, and they went down the balcony steps to the garden. They seated themselves at the further end in one of the little arbours that had been temporarily constructed, and for a few minutes silence reigned between them.

It was a lovely moonlight night, calm and peaceful; at that moment they were almost alone in the garden, and the only sound that broke the stillness was that of the music; for ever and anon, as the white curtains were gently swayed to and fro by the evening breeze, the sweet strains of an inspiring waltz came floating through the air, softened and subdued by distance.

Isabel sighed as she glanced towards the ballroom.

"To look on a scene like that," she said; "one would not think that such a thing as care existed in the world."

"You know, I trust, very little about care, Miss Villiers; I should think that you had everything to make you happy."

"Indeed," she returned, in a somewhat bitter tone; "you mistake; money cannot purchase happiness, it cannot even ensure affection."

"You are right," he said, with a ring of suppressed feeling in his grave, strong tones. "Love gives itself, it is not bought. But how can you think that, with you, the thought of your wealth can, for a moment, dwell in the minds of men! If you know how that wealth has stood like a barrier between us!"

He bent towards her as he spoke. Passionate words of love, of entreaty, were on his lips, when of a sudden footfalls were heard approaching, and the next moment Mrs. Singleton passed by, leaning on the arm of an elderly gentleman.

"Take care you do not take cold, Isabel, my dear!" she said, pausing for a moment. "Do you think it prudent to be sitting there without some light wrap round you?"

"I will fetch it for you," said Lysaght, feeling it impossible to stand there to converse quietly in his present state of mind, and he hastily left them.

Mrs. Singleton soon passed on, and Isabel was left alone, with her heart throbbing and her pulses thrilling with a rapture new to her. She forgot her pride, her ambition; her love held her powerless; through it she was a woman in spite of herself.

After all, what was she striving for? Was she happy in her present life, she asked herself—courted, admired as she was? Ah, for the peaceful haven of a true man's love!

She was aroused from her blissful dreams by the sound of voices close at hand. She could not see the speakers, for they were passing at the back of the arbour, and their conversation would no doubt have passed her by unheeded, had it not been that she chanced to catch the sound of her own name.

"How very beautiful Miss Villiers looks to-night!" said a man's voice that she did not recognize; "and how very devoted Captain Lysaght is! Surprising as it is, I do believe that he has some chance of success."

"Do you think so?" was the answer, in Lady Luxmore's sleepy, affected tones. "I, too, should have imagined she would have aimed higher, though I never did believe in her having so many offers; and everyone knows it is her money

he is after, for he is not the man to care about beauty."

Here the speakers passed on, and their voices became inaudible. Isabel sat motionless, her face white, her lips firmly set. Could it be true? Were his looks, his manner, all false? Was it only her fortune he covets? That former speech of Lady Luxmore's, spoken a few weeks back, which she had suffered herself to forget, recurred to her memory; he had once called her heartless, therefore no doubt this was true.

His previous coldness to her might have been merely intended to disarm any suspicions on her part, and thus enable him more surely to attain his end; and for the rest, did she not know how easily men could feign love when it suited their purpose?

Isabel was somewhat given to form hasty judgments, and act on rash impulses, and though in calmer moments she might not have suffered herself to be influenced by what she had overheard, in her present excited state she was not capable of thinking clearly.

At that moment Claude returned; she controlled herself with an effort, and forced a smile.

"I am sorry you should have taken so much trouble," she said.

"It is a pleasure to me to be able to do anything for you," he replied, diffusing a great deal of expression into the commonplace words, as he placed the lace shawl tenderly around her.

"I think we will go in now," she continued, rising. "I am engaged for the next dance."

"Stay, Miss Villiers, let me ask you to listen to me for one moment. I think you can scarcely be unaware of my feelings towards you; I love you deeply, passionately, and I have sometimes dared to hope I do not love in vain. Isabel, tell me you will consent to be my wife! Let mine be in future the privilege of making you happy."

He spoke in earnest, pleading tones; he forgot everything at that moment—his poverty, the world's reproach. He only felt that without her life would be a blank.

If Isabel had not been utterly blinded by mistaken feelings she could not have failed to perceive the true ring of earnestness in his voice; as it was, there was for a brief space a sharp struggle in her heart, love and pride each fighting for the mastery, but pride conquered; she turned and faced him, speaking in chill, disdainful tones.

"I am afraid you have been encouraging false hopes, Captain Lysaght. I thank you for the honour you have done me, but must beg to decline it."

He listened to her with his face stern and set, and when she ceased, answered her in a cold, hard tone,—

"I must apologize for my presumption, and regret I should have let my feelings carry me away. You will, perhaps, however, do me the justice to acknowledge that it was almost pardonable, considering the encouragement I received."

"I do not understand you," she answered, haughtily, though her heart was throbbing almost to suffocation.

"I cannot make my meaning clearer, and I have no wish to pursue further a topic which is evidently so distasteful to you, and at the same time very painful to me."

He offered her his arm as he spoke, to return to the house; the proprieties have to be considered under all circumstances, and though inclination would have prompted them to place miles between them etiquette compelled them to walk side by side.

As they re-entered the room Charteris came up to them.

"I have been looking for you everywhere, Miss Villiers," he said; "Mrs. Singleton wishes to speak to you."

"Is anything the matter?" Isabel asked, thinking he looked somewhat flushed.

Charteris hesitated.

"Pray answer me, Captain Charteris!" she pursued, drawing herself up with her queenly air.

"Mrs. Singleton, I regret to say, has received intelligence of sudden illness on the part of

Sir Henry, and they have sent for you from Lowndes-square."

The beautiful face before him paled somewhat, but she spoke quietly.

"Is he seriously ill? It is very sudden! He seemed quite well when he went out this evening."

Charteris, however, knew nothing further. Mrs. Singleton had merely told him what he had already disclosed, and had begged him to find her.

Isabel mechanically took the arm he offered her, and they passed through the hall-room downstairs to the carriage. Mrs. Singleton was already seated in, waiting for her.

"I hope you may not find matters as serious as you believe," said Charteris, kindly, as he shook her hand in parting.

On the way home Isabel questioned Mrs. Singleton, but she, too, knew no particulars, beyond the fact that a messenger had been sent to fetch them, as Sir Henry had been taken ill about an hour previously. During the remainder of the drive she lay back in silence, striving to calm her agitation, to still the pain at her heart, and with a sudden foreboding of coming evil assailing her.

As they were crossing the hall the doctor came downstairs. He shook hands with them, and led the way into the dining-room.

"My dear Miss Villiers," he said, gravely, "I am sorry to say that Sir Henry is in a very critical state."

"What is it?" asked Isabel, with white lips.

"An apoplectic seizure. His valet told me that shortly after you left this evening a gentleman arrived to see him on business, and stayed some while. About half-an-hour after he took leave he was startled by a heavy fall in the library, and found Sir Henry lying on the ground quite unconscious."

"Do you not think he will recover?" asked Isabel so quietly that Dr. Lane was taken aback.

"I fear there is, indeed, little hope," he answered, after a moment's hesitation. "I have known Sir Henry to be out of health for some while, and I warned him not long ago that if he did not follow certain rules I could not answer for the consequences."

"I will go to him at once," said Isabel, and she left the room as she spoke.

She hastened first to her own, flung off her ball-dress and ornaments, and slipping on a dressing-gown betook herself to her father's bedside. She remained with him the remainder of the night, but it was only towards morning that he gave any sign of consciousness.

When he recognised her he tried in vain to speak. There was evidently something he was very anxious to explain; but she could only make out a few words about having wronged her.

She tried to soothe him, attaching no importance to his disconnected sentences, and he soon lapsed into unconsciousness.

So the weary day wore on. It was about noon when Dr. Lane gently drew Isabel from the bedside.

"We can none of us do anything for him now, Miss Villiers; you must go and lie down."

At first she hardly seemed to gather his meaning.

"Is it all over?" she murmured.

"Yes," he replied, "we must be thankful he did not suffer much."

She passively allowed Mrs. Singleton to lead her away, for the various emotions of the last few hours had quite worn her out; and when she reached her own room she sank down on an arm-chair, and, for the first time in her life, fainted away.

CHAPTER VI.

The next day the emotions of the fashionable world were somewhat excited at the intelligence of the death of Sir Henry Villiers.

There were a few exclamations of "how very sad" and "how very sudden." The men wondered what he was worth; the women speculated

for how long a time Miss Villiers would exclude herself from the world; then after a day or two the equanimity of society was restored, and poor Sir Henry as thoroughly forgotten as though he had never lived.

Towards evening the following day Arthur Charteris walked into his friend's room.

"Have you heard that Sir Henry Villiers is dead?" he asked, as he seated himself.

Lysaght started.

"No, when did he die?"

"This morning. You were by, were you not, when I fetched Miss Villiers away?"

Lysaght winced at the name. "Yes," he answered in a cold, brief tone, that caused his friend to look at him searchingly.

"You look ill, old fellow," he said kindly; "is anything the matter?"

For a minute or two Lysaght was silent. Perhaps he was questioning whether or no to tell his friend; perhaps he was striving to speak quietly.

"I followed your advice," he answered at length, with an effort; "and I regret I should have done so. Miss Villiers has refused me."

Charteris started up in surprise. "Refused me?" he exclaimed; "after the encouragement she gave you!"

"I am glad I was not the only one misled," said Claude, in the same constrained voice.

"I can hardly believe it," went on Charteris. "I was sure that girl loved you. There must be some mistake, Claude; matters will come right yet."

Lysaght shook his head. "Impossible," he said. "I should never condescend to ask Miss Villiers for any reason for her conduct, and expose myself to be twice refused. She made it only too plain to me how little desirous she was for the offer I made her. I was a fool to have let myself be so deceived as to imagine she cared for me; she must have been merely amusing herself at my expense, and no doubt credits me with the same motives as does the world."

"Nay, Lysaght, she must know you better than that."

"Her manner did not lead me to think so," replied Claude, a look of pain contracting his handsome features.

"Well, she will be severely punished, for I do not doubt but that her father's affairs are in a very entangled state."

Lysaght made no reply. Though his haughty spirit still writhed under the sting of a refusal—and a refusal so heartlessly given—it was yet no palliation of his suffering to hear that still further sorrow menaced the woman who had dealt him such a blow.

"Dear old fellow, I am so sorry. If only I could do anything for you," pursued kind-hearted Charteris.

Lysaght smiled sadly. "Let me retain your friendship always, my dear Arthur; I shall let that content me in future, and not try to win the love of any woman."

Arthur gave his friend's hand a shake more expressive than words. "You must cheer up, Claude; if Miss Villiers refuse you there are plenty of girls only too proud to be chosen by you."

"There is but one woman in the world for me, Charteris," returned Lysaght; "and if I cannot win her I shall choose no other. And now do not let us talk of this any more; I cannot yet bear it calmly."

We must return awhile to Isabel. Although shocked and grieved at her father's death it was not that alone which caused her such keen suffering. Now that she could reflect calmly she found it impossible to mistrust Lysaght; she recalled his words, his looks, bearing as they did the strong impress of truth; and a bitter remorse began to assail her for the course she had pursued, feeling conscious that by her own act she had wrecked her happiness. At times she would reproach herself bitterly for not thinking of and mourning more for the loss of her father, recalling all his indulgence, and striving to forget the chill barrier that ever existed between them.

It was on the afternoon of the day of the

funeral that she received a message from her father's solicitor, Mr. Granley, to the effect that if she were well enough he should much wish to speak with her. Isabel gave orders to show him into her boudoir, and repaired thither to meet him.

He came forward to receive her as she entered, and offered her his condolences. Then he begged her to be seated, apologising for intruding on her so soon.

Isabel bent her head with her stately grace.

"I shall always be ready to attend to you," she said, quietly. "I suppose it is with reference to my father's will that you would speak to me."

"Yes, that is so," replied Mr. Granley, hesitatingly.

He was evidently ill at his ease, and seemed at a loss how to enter on the subject. At last he said somewhat abruptly,—

"You will believe me, will you not, my dear Miss Villiers, that nothing but dire necessity would have compelled me to disturb you thus soon in your grief, and to enter on matters so painful as those I am about to disclose to you?"

Isabel turned her lovely eyes on him with a startled look in their lustrous depths.

"What do you mean?" she faltered.

"Did your father ever lead you to suppose that his affairs were in any way involved?" he proceeded.

"Involved!" she repeated, dreamily, as though she failed to catch the full meaning of his words.

"Did he tell you nothing of his money matters?"

The interview with her father in that very room, some three months back, recurred to Isabel's mind, and her heart began to throb with painful apprehension. She sat gazing at the lawyer in breathless silence.

"You were not aware he kept racehorses?" he went on.

"No!"

"Then I am afraid you have been very much misled," said Mr. Granley, warmly. "I don't wish to speak ill of Sir Henry, but I don't think he ought to have—"

"Please remember you are speaking to Sir Henry's daughter!" interrupted Isabel, haughtily. Mr. Granley was in no way offended.

"I know—I know," he said, hastily, "I shouldn't say anything of the sort to you, but he should not have brought you up in such luxury only to leave you penniless."

"Penniless! As he spoke her father's last disconnected words flashed across her; he must have wished to tell her something of this. So there was yet more for her to bear."

As gently as he could Mr. Granley explained the case. It seemed that Sir Henry had never been possessed of such vast wealth as had been imagined, although owning a handsome fortune, and that of late years he had incurred vast debts.

He had kept several racehorses, but lately had had a run of ill-luck, to relieve which he had betaken himself to speculation. But this had likewise proved most disastrous, and the seizure which had caused his death had, no doubt, been brought on by the intelligence that one in which he had an enormous stake at issue had quite collapsed.

In short, after selling off the horses, the house, and the small estate in Devonshire, there would be barely two hundred a-year saved out of the wreck for Isabel.

For a brief space the girl was quite stunned by this fresh blow, then she rallied her energies. She clothed herself in a proud reserve, repelling even all sympathy; for she determined that, whatever her sufferings, she would hide them from the rest of the world.

She depicted herself in those early days even to Eva Chichester; she felt, poor girl, at war with all, and was conscious that her friend's gentle words of love and pity would be powerless to soothe her sore and wounded spirit.

CHAPTER VII.

MEANWHILE the news of Sir Henry's insolvency, when generally known, had been received with incredulous surprise.

Society felt itself aggrieved, for it would never have wasted its courtesies on one whom it liked as little as Sir Henry Villiers had he not been the wealthy man he was reputed. As for Miss Villiers she was accorded by some but a very scant meed of sympathy.

She had, in truth, never troubled herself to win the favour of the world; she had been content to rule it, and the women whom she had outrivaled, the men whose vanity she had wounded, were not likely to feel much compassion for her altered fortunes.

"By Jove!" said Sir Harry Lynden, as he stood in his club-window discussing the topic with one or two other men; "what hard lines it is for Miss Villiers. Delamere, she would have done better to have taken you or me; don't you think so?"

Lord Delamere smiled as he stroked his moustaches.

"She might be won now, I should think."

"Perhaps, but the reason of the winning would not be flattering to one's self-love."

"Self-love," repeated Lord Delamere, satirically. "You must put that in your pocket, Harry, if you wish to get what you want. One must stoop to conquer."

"I don't approve of that theory," returned Lynden; "however, as you are in favour of it, you should put it into practice, and try your luck with Miss Villiers for what is, let us say, the third time!"

"Anyhow, it must be more often than you have asked," said Lord Delamere with a frown as he turned to leave the room.

"Adieu, and good luck," called out Lynden after him.

"He must be very much in love," remarked one of the other men, as the door closed on the Earl.

"In love!" disdainfully repeated Lynden. "My dear Morton, Delamere has never been guilty of the weakness of being in love with anyone but himself."

"Anyhow, Miss Villiers is sure to accept him now."

"Not by any means so sure. If he goes to her with that grand condescending manner of his he will put her pride up, and she will have nothing to say to him. I know Miss Villiers better than you," and Lynden gave a sigh as he thought of the brief dream of happiness in which he had once indulged.

"You will find out you are wrong, Lynden. When she thinks of the alternative she will overlook a good deal," said Morton. "My dear fellow, just reflect for a moment; on the one hand a dull prospect and straitened means, on the other a fine position, a handsome settlement, and splendid family diamonds. Why there's not a woman would hesitate."

"Perhaps not," said Sir Harry with a careless whistle, as he turned away, acknowledging to himself that it would need great strength of mind to withstand such a temptation.

Lord Delamere lost no time in putting his fate to the touch, for he heard that Miss Villiers was likely to leave town very soon, as the house in Lowndes-square and all the effects were to be sold. Sir Harry Lynden had not been wrong in his estimate of him. He was far too selfish and arrogant to be capable of true affection; he was merely anxious to have for his wife one of the handsomest women in England, in much the same way that he liked to be able to boast that he owned a better stud and a finer collection of pictures than any man of his acquaintance.

Of rejection now he never dreamt. The only thing that had place in his thoughts was his extreme generosity in asking any woman for the third time to be his wife—a generosity of which he intended her to be fully conscious.

When he pulled up his tilbury at the door in Lowndes-square he was informed that Miss Villiers saw no one. In no way daunted he gave the man his card, and requested him to tell Miss Villiers that he would be greatly obliged by her

granting him a few minutes' interview. It was difficult to refuse such a request, and Lord Delamere was shortly ushered into the drawing-room, and informed that Miss Villiers would join him in a few minutes.

He glanced round at the costly magnificence of the room. Was it likely that any woman would refuse to continue in such luxury if the choice lay in her own hands? The opening of the door made him turn, and as he advanced to meet her he felt it was certainly worth a little sacrifice of his pride to be able to win such a lovely woman for his wife.

"I trust my pertinacity did not annoy you, Miss Villiers," he said, as he shook hands.

"Oh, no; it merely surprised me somewhat," she returned, in cold tones.

"You will, I feel sure, pardon it when you learn its cause."

The beautiful eyes turned on him with surprise. Isabel knew his character, and it never entered her head that, in her altered fortunes, he would renew his former proposals.

"I must first tender to you my sincere condolence for your bereavement, and for the—the—" Lord Delamere's rhetoric failed him for the moment—"for the fresh trouble that has since overtaken you."

She bowed her head with haughty grace, and a slight tinge of colour suffused her pale cheeks. For a few minutes silence reigned, which was broken at length by Lord Delamere.

"Miss Villiers," he commenced, in much the same tone as though he were about to make a speech in the Upper House, "Miss Villiers, my regard and admiration for you are no secret to you. I will not, therefore, repeat what you have so often heard me give expression to. You have twice refused to accept my proposals; I am now in hopes that you will grant them a more favourable hearing, and that you will consent at length to become my wife."

Coldly the words fell on her ears, powerless to rouse a single emotion, to quicken the beat of a single pulse, yet they opened to her an unexpected escape from a dreary and dreaded future.

She did not like the man, yet he could give her the rank she was so well fitted to adorn, the power she so dearly loved. Her enemies, who were rejoicing at her downfall would still have to bow beneath her sovereignty.

She was heart-sick and miserable; she longed to blot out and forget the past, with its haunting memories of a joy that she had wantonly thrown away; in a life of excitement and change she might be able to stifle the unavailing regret and the hopeless love that filled her heart.

(Continued on page 211.)

MADELINE GRANT.

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CHAPTER XXXIX.

ASOUR a day or two after Miss Florence had despatched her letter Lord Levante met with an accident; nothing very serious or very dangerous.

He fell over a rock about twenty feet high, and what is called "ricked" his back, and was forced to keep his bed for some time in consequence, where he lay whiling away the time between eating and novel-reading, and in a very bad temper—illness proverbially tries a man's temper; and during the long hours that Lord Levante lay nailed to his bed he mentally saw some other aspirant for the heiress's hand, taking the vacant post he had quitted, and having his "innings."

He was perfectly right in his surmises, for Lord Cecil Rodney (whom Florence had counted on as her own exclusive property) now seized the opportunity, and broke Miss Blunt's chains with scant hesitation, and attached himself in a marked manner to the chateleine's train.

Such an open, flagrant secession was a terrible blow to the plain-faced, but inordinately vain, Florence.

She quivered with suppressed rage as she held her renegade admirer playing tennis with Madeline, sitting by Madeline, carrying Madeline's shawl or parasol, and actually haunting her like her shadow.

She stamped with passion (in the privacy of her own apartment), as she thought of all the wiles and signals and smiles she had wasted on the wretch, to lure him back, in vain; how she lingered behind the others on the hills; how she waylaid him in the gardens; how she said, purposely said, bitter things to Madeline to throw her into a passion, and make her forget herself, and thus disenchant her new admirer—all in vain!

Maddie was proof, was cool, polite, invulnerable, and now and then Mr. Glyn, who had been watching these malicious traps with contemptuous amusement, took up the gauntlet that Miss Grant declined, and did battle with Miss Blunt—in a manner that tried her wit and her temper, and generally left both in a sorry plight.

He had an exasperating smile, that drove Florence nearly wild.

But her passages-at-arms with Maddie were no business of his, and in her wrath one day she boldly told him so.

Much as she told herself she loathed Lord Cecil secretly she detested Madeline far more.

She assured herself over and over again that but for her Lord Cecil had meant to propose; and, oh! what a triumph would she have had if she had returned from these Highland shootings having figuratively "bagged" a lord!

The girls of her acquaintance would have nearly died of envy, and now it was she herself who was consumed with that gnawing pain.

She was one of those girls—few and far between, let us hope, and generally excessively plain—whose lack of natural charms is made up by an overpowering supply of self-esteem, and who fondly imagine that almost every man they see is in love with them.

Every little attention is twisted by them; and was twisted by Flo into something remarkable.

If a man did not say anything, or take an apparent notice of her—and she was twitted with this when she propounded her triumphs to other young ladies—she solemnly assured them that he "looked" volumes.

Her imagination was so daring, the flights of fancy so superb, that there was no dealing with her on the grounds of plain facts and common sense, and "Flo and her lovers" was a byword in her circle.

So besotted was she, that when she actually made advances herself, as in the last instance, in giving button-holes and photographs, and her entire attentions, she persuaded herself that it was the other way about—that Lord Cecil was devoted to her, and Madeline had taken him from her; in point of fact the young man did not even like Miss Flo.

She was too much down on other people—women—and had too sharp a tongue; besides, she was hideous.

Oh, that she had heard him, and had been doing her dead best "to run him in."

Now, Miss Grant was quite another affair, and Levante being out of the way, he saw no harm in trying his luck—he did not, but Mr. Glyn did; and although he told himself that his Madeline (he presumed from knowing that his eye was upon her) was a model of discretion—yes, even in his jealous eyes—and kept Levante and this other fool (meaning Lord Cecil) well at their distance, yet, even presuming that they were after her money and not herself, he could not stand it; which, considering how he had assured Madeline that she was nothing to him now,—nothing more than a stranger—was certainly extremely odd.

The state of affairs at Dunearn was as follows:—

There was Lord Cecil striving to make himself agreeable to the heiress, and making but very small way—there was Mr. Glyn, an equal prey to pride and jealousy, and half-distracted between the two, but bearing himself, nevertheless, like the Spartan boy and fox—there was Mr. Grant, innocent as a lamb of the real state of affairs, forming every day a stronger liking for his unknown son-in-law,—there was Flo keeping

her hand in with one of the Highland officers, and bragging largely about papa's ships and papa's greenhouses and papa's paintings, but still keeping her eye upon her late recreant admirer and Madeline.

How she hated them; how she absolutely panted for Isabella's letter, and hoped most fervently that it would enable her to get a hold upon Madeline and Madeline's secret—for that she had one she was perfectly confident.

And thus days went by, and Lord Robert Montagu, having been met at some neighbouring Highland games, was added to the party; and between his crafty allusions, Flo's concealed hostility (like a viper among flowers), and Hugh's all-pervading eye, Madeline felt that her part was getting beyond her, and that, sooner or later, she must break down.

She had to parry Flo's sharp questions—she had to bribe the impudent Lord Robert—to pose as an unmarried lady; to accept a certain amount of attentions in that character, and yet hold her admirers so delicately in hand as not to give her husband offence, and to bear his approbation by Fanny Fortescue as best she might.

Meanwhile, as matters were in this condition, and as all these contrasting facts were simmering in the social crucible upstairs, affairs were coming to a crisis in the servants' hall.

There were at first, as the evenings commenced to close in, rumours, and murmurs, and whispers—that were at first vague, but gradually, like a rolling snowball, took shape and form—the house was haunted; so said the English servants, who (the maids) went about in gangs in the twilight, and looked over their shoulders with trepidation as they ventured about the passages and corridors after sundown.

The Scotch people, who evidently had a firm belief in the supernatural character of the castle, only shook their heads and muttered that it was "aye bad in winter," and invariably slept out.

The panic had spread to such an extent that the "talk" came to the ears of the host, hostess, and guests.

Some of the most timid of the servants had "given warning," and vowed they would rather pay their own way back to London than stop any longer in such an awful place.

Being questioned they admitted that they had seen nothing; but Polly Faren, the upper-housemaid, swore that she had felt an icy-cold hand laid against her face one night—there were mysterious sounds of the pipes playing a pibroch of funeral laments, with unearthly and long-drawn screeches of musical agony where no pipes could be—there were supernatural warnings without number, and the mysterious windows were now the common topic of the hour.

"If this state of affairs continues," said Madeline, joining her guests, as they sat in the gloaming in the time when it is just too early for candles, and too dark to read or work agreeably, "we shall be driven away—whether we like it or not!"

"What do you mean, Madeline?" said Lady Rachel, laying down her newspaper. "Not more ghosts, surely—no more servants leaving because they really cannot stay?"

"But they are," shrugging her shoulders as she spoke. "No less than four have had audience of me now, and I'm 'to please to suit myself at once'—a pretty joke, when I can't suit myself nearer than Edinburgh—and, please, ma'am, they all want to go at once—immediately. And the worst is to come, good people—the cook is leaving!"

"What!" shrieked Lady Rachel, "that Frenchwoman who literally believes in nothing!"

"Nevertheless she is the most superstitious of the whole party, and was actually shaking like one of her own blanchemanges. She says she has seen the—. You can fill up the blank as you like!"

"And what are you going to do?" inquired one of the Misses Fortescue, coolly.

She had no anxiety. She was not mistress of a house, and she rather felt a little envious of Madeline, who managed such a large establish-

ment so easily and so admirably; the machinery worked without any noise or creaking.

"I have told them that they were silly, and influenced by their Scotch surroundings—by heavy, late suppers, and so on—and that when they went back to London at their own expense, without any character, as far as I was concerned, they would be well laughed at by their friends—and very much ashamed of their own folly. So they are going to try another month of it."

"You must have been very eloquent to have made such an impression on them—it's more than many people would have done," said Lord Cecil, who, with two or three others, now joined the circle drawn round, near a big, long fire, nicely scented with fine big pine cone; "but there is this to be said—you don't believe in these things yourself, do you, Miss Grant?"

"Not I," she ejaculated, contemptuously.

"And that goes a long way. Example is better than precept, and they see that you are not afraid."

"But I am," put in Florence Blunt, anxious to draw some attention to herself. "I'm most horribly afraid of ghosts, and now that I hear all these horrid stories I am sure I shall never be able to sleep. Madeline, you must lend me your maid to stay in my room at night."

"You have not heard any horrid stories yet, Miss Blunt. The chief thing about the ghosts or ghosts here is that it is unintelligible, no one has seen it," put in Fanny Fortescue, sinking into a chair beside Hugh; "we have nothing to go upon."

"Oh, yes, we have plenty—only too much. The last owner of this castle was found in his bed, dead—strangled—with horrid marks upon his throat; and the one before him, who was an infant, was mysteriously thrown into the loch and drowned—so the story goes. It may or may not be true."

"And the present proprietor very prudently stays away," put in Mr. Glyn, "and lets his tenants run all these risks. I must say that I admire his discretion."

"Supposing some one were to tell us a good ghost story," said Lady Rachel, briskly. "Now's the time, and now's the hour. I do delight in a real creepy one, that makes one feel as if cold water was slowly trickling down one's back."

"I think I can meet your wishes, Lady Rachel," said the elder Miss Fortescue. "I know a pretty bad one, and I had it from the lips of the girl it happened to. Will that suit?"

"Perfectly," in a tone of delighted anticipation.

"But I must make one stipulation, and that is, that if I tell one, and amuse or horrify all the company, some one else will, in turn, follow suit and amuse me, or curdle my blood, as the case may be. That's only fair."

"Quite fair," responded her sister Fanny, "and when you have finished Mr. Glyn shall tell a story. I," laying her hand playfully on his arm, "shall take good care that he does not get off."

"Very well, then, that's settled," exclaimed three or four voices in chorus—"and now, Miss Fortescue, begin—begin at once, and close up round the fire, and stir up the logs, somebody."

"Well," said the young lady, who was not averse to concentrating all the attention in herself, clearing her throat, and nursing either elbow in a hand—a favourite attitude; "a great friend of mine, who lives near us in London, went down to stay in Hertfordshire, last year, with some relations of hers, who had just got a country place in rather an out-of-the-way neighbourhood for what they called 'an old song,' and they kept writing such glowing descriptions that she was easily prevailed on to go down and pay them a visit.

"She arrived, was impressed by a fine park and long avenue, but not by the mansion, which looked as if it had 'a story,' and was, besides, as damp as it was dismal.

"She was received with open arms, and, after a time, escorted to her room, which was large—far too large to please her, with no less than five doors—though three of them were cupboards, as she subsequently discovered—and with an

immense four-post bed in the middle of the room.

"She told her cousin that it was much too large and too grand a room for her—that was how she put it—and asked for a more humble and smaller apartment; but there was no other in which she could sleep, and she had to make the best of circumstances, and hold her tongue.

"But, all the same, she was not looking forward to bedtime with any great pleasure, and when she did go up to bed she thought the apartment looked duller and darker and drearier by candlelight than when she had seen it last. She took a very long time in going to bed, purposely dawdling and reading and sitting over the fire.

"At last she could no longer put off the evil moment, and plunged into the middle of the immense four-poster, which, I should mention, was large enough to hold six people with comfort, and had no curtains beyond a kind of valance round the top.

"She fell asleep pretty soon, being tired with her long journey. How long she slept she could not say, but suddenly she awoke with a kind of start, as if she had been frightened—how, she could not tell, only her heart, for some unknown reason, was beating very, very fast, and she had an indefinable sense of dread and oppression—and just then the odd clock on the landing struck 'one,' and barely had the echoes of the clang died away when one of the five doors—that facing the foot of the bed, and which she had locked—slowly opened, and, by the light of the fire, which seemed to blaze up expressly for the occasion, she saw a middle-aged man, in evening clothes, come slowly into the room.

"He had a large bundle of papers in his hand, and a japanned deed-box under one arm. He closed the door carefully after him, advanced to the fire, and drew up a chair.

"She did not know what to do. She never for a moment dreamed that he was not a living man, and she sat up in bed, and looked about for the bell-rope. There was none.

"Meanwhile, the new comer coolly opened the deed-box, and piled paper after paper on the fire. How they flamed up! She half expected to see the chimney in a blaze. Such was the illumination that every nook and cranny of the room was as well lit up as if it were daylight. She could hear the paper crackling, and see bits of it, half blackened, floating up the chimney.

"Who was this wretch? who dared to make such use of her fire at such an hour? Her anger was as hot as the embers themselves, and she spoke—

"Sir," she cried, "who are you? and how dare you come into my room in this way!"

"In a second, it seemed to her, that he was standing beside her. The blaze on the hearth kept getting brighter and brighter, and as she looked into his face she saw something that chilled the very marrow in her bones.

"There was something in his expression so unnatural, so ghastly, and so despairing that she sank down with a shudder and dragged the bedclothes over her head, whilst her heart beat as if it would suffocate her or jump out of her mouth.

"How long the time seemed till the clock struck two! She never remembered anything like it. It seemed a week, and she must have slept."

"Surely he was gone now!"

"She carefully, cautiously peeped forth. He was gone. He was no longer at the fire.

"Ah," she breathed freely once more; but as she glanced at the foot of the bed she gave a stifled shriek.

"What was this she saw hanging from one of the bedposts, his arms hanging limply down, his head bent forward on his breast, his eyes staring wide open, but the man she had seen at the fire!"

"He had hanged himself!"

"He hung there motionless and dead. The fire flamed up, and showed her this fearful sight only too distinctly.

"She dashed out of bed, terror adding wings to her feet, made for the door, and burst into the first room she could find.

"Her two girl-cousins slept there, and were justly alarmed at her abrupt descent on them, screaming,—

"A man has hanged himself in my room! and then she went off into the most fearful hysterics.

"The house was immediately roused, a rush made to the big spare bed-room. There was nothing to be seen—nothing whatever. It was empty!

"Next morning my friend was interviewed seriously by all her cousins, who declared that it was fried plum-pudding she had partaken of at dinner, and merely a bad nightmare. Any other idea was too funny, they assured her.

"It was not at all funny from her point of view, and, to prove that she was serious, she insisted I went going home that very same afternoon.

"Nothing would induce her to sleep in that house, much less in that room, another night, and nothing would make her shake her intention, and she left, very much shaken and unnerved.

"In time all the family followed her example, and the Manor was shut up for another term of years, and advertised as a gentlemanly property cheap. The former proprietor had hanged himself in the brown bedroom, and made himself so obnoxious to subsequent tenants that they cleared out in turn, after a very short stay, and left him the whole mansion to himself."

"I don't call that a very bad story," said Madeline, when Miss Fortescue ceased. "It was some old family servant who had excellent reasons of his own for playing the ghost, and the hanging man was merely a dummy he kept in one of the cupboards. Believe me, there is no such thing as appearances; and I would sleep in that big room to-morrow if it were near this—sleep in it with pleasure, and put the dummy on the fire."

"Seeing is believing," said Miss Fanny, shortly, not liking to see cold water thrown upon her sister's crack story. "Maybe you will have a different opinion one of these days, Miss Grant. I won't be so wicked as to say I hope you will see something; and now," patting Mr. Glyn affectionately and encouragingly on the back of his hand, "there will be just time for your tale before the gong sounds. You must, you know, I have promised for you."

But we will reserve Mr. Glyn's ghost story for another chapter.

CHAPTER XL.

"Miss FORTESCUE desires me to tell a story, and, of course, to hear is to obey," said Mr. Glyn, crossing his arms, and looking steadily round the company. "I shall not detain the court long, for I only know one anecdote that is at all near the mark, and that is a short one and true.

"I heard it from a man who knew the fellow well—a fellow who was as brave where ghosts are concerned as Miss Grant is," nodding gravely towards her, "and he, like her, declared himself ready to occupy any haunted room, no matter what its character, on the shortest possible notice. It seems that one evening at a bachelor's dinner, our present thrilling topic came on the *tapis*, and one terrible story after another was told by members of the company.

"The climax was the history of an old house—that no one could live in it, that had hitherto defied the most valiant of ghost-hunters.

"It had not been occupied for thirty years, except by caretakers, who came timidly in by day and left before the lamps were lit. It had belonged to a very strange, wizard-like old man, who bequeathed it to a relative in India, a man who lived out in the East, and vainly endeavoured to let the property through his agents; but, do what he could, and reduce the rent as he might, it was all of no avail. The house had a bad name, and even the adjoining houses—such was its desperate reputation—were empty.

"This seemed the very abode for this gentleman—my friend's friend—to lay his hands on, and in spite of all kinds of warnings and dreadful prognostications, he set about gaining admittance.

"The next day he had an interview with the

agent and with the caretaker, and it was arranged that he should take up his quarters under the roof of the haunted house that very evening. I will try and tell his experience in his own words as well as I can remember them, but they came to me second-hand:—

"(He said) arrived at the house about nine o'clock at night. It was a large, gloomy old place, with many narrow windings, a deep area, and a heavy portico. In this portico I found the caretaker waiting, prudently posted outside, key in hand. 'I've lit a fire in the big front bed-room,' he said. He was an old army pensioner. 'I've left two pair o' candles and a box o' matches, and my wife has made up the bed and aired the sheets, and I hope as you'll be comfortable,' he added, very doubtfully, opening the door with a big key, which he handed to me; and, giving one look into the black, dark hall, he saluted, and hurried down the steps.

"I had no fears whatever. I marched direct upstairs, and entered a room where there was a fire lit—a large bed-room, overlooking the street, comfortably, but old-fashioned furnished. There was a roaring fire (something very cheerful in a good fire), an arm-chair drawn up before it, and a table with candles hard by.

"I first lit the candles; then I thoroughly and rigidly searched the room, and found nothing, except a few old books in a closet and an old hat case. Next I locked the door, drew up the chair to the hearth, got out a magazine from my pocket, and a pipe, and set to work to enjoy a night in a haunted house.

"I laughed to myself at the very idea. There was not a sound, except the far-away, distant rumble of the carts and the striking of the church clocks. My book was interesting, and I read on uninterruptedly for a couple of hours, keeping an eye to the fire, of course. So interested was I with my story that I altogether forgot my whereabouts, and had actually become so oblivious of my surroundings that I had forgotten I was not seated at home by my own hearth; but presently I was roused by sounds—very slight sounds—in the house. 'Rats of course,' I said—sounds that became louder and evolved themselves into footsteps; rustling dresses passing my door—voices and laughter, and many, yes, a great many, people seemingly trooping downstairs. 'Rats still,' I declared. No one would believe, unless they actually saw them with their own eyes, the extraordinary noises that rats were capable of making. This I assured myself very urgently, and also that I know better than to allow rats to frighten me. The sounds, too, had ceased.

"After a silence of, say a quarter of an hour, I heard a quick, firm step coming up the stairs, and immediately afterwards there was a loud knock at my door—a human-sounding knock. No rat this! I sat in silence for two or three minutes. The knock came again—an impatient knock this time. So I got up, laid down my book, walked to the door, unlocked it, and threw it open.

"The landing was illuminated, and on the threshold stood a tall, powdered face man, in gorgeous crimson and gold livery, who said, as he made a slight inclination of his head,—"Dinner is ready!"

"I looked at him hard, in speechless surprise, and then I replied,—"Dinner is ready!"

"I am not coming," and immediately closed and locked the door.

"In a few minutes more back he came again, and knocked. I opened the door as before, and said this time,—"Dinner is ready; everyone is waiting!"

"I told you I was not coming," I said, impatiently, with the door in my hand.

"He inclined his powdered head most respectfully, and once more I slammed the door on him.

"All the same, in about five minutes there came a knock again. I was getting annoyed, and I flung the door wide open and said,—"Well, what is it now?"

"Dinner is ready, the company are waiting, and the master says you must come."

"So on second, or rather on third, thoughts I made up my mind to follow him and see the adventure out; and making a sign to that effect I

followed him down the wide shallow stairs, now brilliantly lit up, and into a large dining-room, where about twenty people, in full evening dress of the last century, were seated at a dinner-table loaded with silver and gold plate and wax lights. There was a buzz of talking and laughing, and whispering, which suddenly ceased as we entered; and an elderly gentleman, with a gay perruque and crimson coat, and the most piercing black eyes I had ever met—eyes that scorched like flame—rose from his seat at the head of the table, made me such a bow as for elegance I have never received before, and indicated my place, which was at his right hand, between two lovely women in saucers and patches and powdered hair. At first I had an idea that I was the subject of a practical joke, that this was all a masquerade; but looking round the table I did not see one familiar face, but one or two of them were familiar historical faces it seemed to me—that is, the face of men and women, who, eighty years previously, had been notorious for duelling, dining, or drinking.

"The master now filled out a bumper, and looking round the company, said, in a harsh, grating voice,—"To our new friend!"

"My own glass was filled by one of the many attendants with red, red wine, and I was about to raise it to my lips when, casting a glance at my host, something diabolical in the look of his eyes restrained me, and standing up, I said,—

"Ladies and gentlemen, before partaking of your kind hospitality, and thanking you for your toast, permit me to say grace, and ask a blessing on our meal, and there and then I loudly repeated a grace!

"Before the words had left my lips there was a sound of thunder mingled with oaths, and curses, and screams. The lights went out, the company vanished instantaneously, and I was standing alone in a big, empty dining-room beside a bare mahogany table. This much I could see by the glare of an adjacent street lamp which stood close outside, and the window shutters were not closed.

"I then went up to my room, not feeling the least alarmed, but rather triumphant at having broken up the party, and being no longer disturbed by the knocks, nor by a single sound of any sort or kind. I went to bed, and slept soundly—slept until the daylight came streaming in between the chinks of my shutters, and warned me that it was time to rise.

"My friend, John Forbes, came for me in a great state of trepidation, evidently, vastly relieved to find that I was all right, and we went off together arm-in-arm and had breakfast at the club."

"This," said Mr. Glyn, after a moment's pause, "is all that's known of his experience."

"And is that the end of the story!" cried Miss Fanny Fortescue, discontentedly. "How unsatisfactory. Who were those people!—how was it all accounted for!—surely there is more!"

"There is more; the end is told by John Forbes," said Mr. Glyn. "The other man, emboldened by his former experience, insisted on passing the following night in the same manner, resolved to discover some more about the mysterious inmates of the house. He was left there at the same hour as on the first occasion; and when John Forbes called for him as previously the next morning, he knocked and rang in vain—no sound came; no one opened the door; no sound, except what Forbes swears he heard, and that was a laugh—a laugh that froze the very blood in his veins. In the end they had to get a locksmith and break open the door, and John Forbes discovered his friend stone dead at the foot of the stairs."

"And that was all!" put in Flo, with a gasp.

"All!" exclaimed Lady Rachael, tragically. "It was enough, I should imagine. What had happened to him?"

"He fell down stairs in the dark and broke his neck," said Madeline, coolly; "a very simple solution, I should imagine. Was not that it?" looking steadily at the late narrator of the tale.

"No; no bones were broken. I believe he had

been strangled, at least, so John Forbes said; but the whole affair was hushed up—they talked of a fit."

"And a fit it was, you may be sure," returned Miss Grant, decisively. Nothing would make her believe in such stories. "I hope you are not all feeling very nervous," looking round at the other ladies; "if you are afraid of your own shadows you have to thank Miss Fortescue and Mr. Glyn. We must have some reels to-night, to dance away the goblins. Ah! there is the gong at last!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Lady Rachel, rising with a shiver, and shaking out the train of her long satin tea-gown, "I don't like this conversation at all; I feel all goose flesh since I've been sitting here listening to these stories, and although I don't believe in ghosts I should be exceedingly sorry to see one."

"Then you do believe in them, Rachel!" said Madeline; "that last speech of yours admits as much. No, I go so far as to say that even if I saw one I would not believe in it!"

"A bold statement, Miss Grant," said Lord Cecil; "let us hope that your challenge will not be taken up, nor your announcement put to the proof. Most people allow that seeing is believing."

CHAPTER XLII

MATTERS were gradually coming to a crisis at Dunkern. Things (as the Americans would say) had been "working round" for some time past.

Miss Blunt's envy and affronted vanity was smouldering, and ready to blase out at the smallest provocation. It only needed a letter, now on its way to her, to transform her into a social firebrand, and to enable her to set everyone in the company by the ears.

Then Mr. Glyn was human, and although he had done with Madeline in theory, in reality he was very fond of her still; and although he looked back upon little Harry's deathbed with bitterness when he thought of her absence, yet he was inclined to soften down her failings; consequently in his own mind he had an inward conviction that Madeline was penitent, and was anxious to make amends for the past if he would meet her half-way with a day of grace.

A look, a word, had dropped from her occasionally that served as straws to show which way the current was setting.

He was relenting a little. Yes, he felt that he was only punishing himself as well as her. He would go to Mr. Grant, who was most partial, most amazingly benevolent to him; tell him, in as well chosen words as he could, the plain truth, and claim his daughter as his wife!

This scheme had been on the eve of being carried out when Lord Robert arrived, and everything was changed.

He naturally looked at the intimacy between him and Madeline with disgust, contempt, incredulity, and suppressed fury.

What had he to say to her so often in confidence? How dare he whisper to her, sit beside her, bend over her, loiter behind her coming home from shooting? What did it mean? And she did not snub him; she accepted the situation, and lent him her company and her ear. What was the clue to this? Was it possible that she was in love with this cynical-looking, crafty, sandy-haired roué? But no, he did not think so badly of her at that.

The same evening that they had been relating ghost stories he found himself in the library alone.

There was reel dancing in the big hall, but the fun was too fast and too furious to suit his present frame of mind.

He did not affect the pipes nor the national dance, and he strolled into the big, empty library and read the papers. Then he went over and pulled aside the curtains and looked out.

It was a bright moonlight night, frosty and clear; the castle was casting a great black shadow across the lawn, and beyond that all looked as bright as day.

He leant his arms on the window-ledges, and

stood for a long time not really at the scene, but wrapt in thought.

He must return to town in a day or two at farthest, and before he went he must have a word with Madeline, and, perhaps, with her father, even although she paraded as Miss Grant.

He had given her leave to do so. It passed all human forbearance that she should so entirely forget what was due to Mrs. Glyn—should allow this insidious, needy reprobate to whisper in her ear and to gaze in her eyes as if she were free—as if she did not, in reality, belong to him—Hugh Glyn, who had to stand aside and restrain many a fierce impulse to take Lord Robert by the throat and choke him.

He was standing in the shadow of the curtain when, at this instant, the two people of whom he was thinking came quickly into the room—the room dimly lit by one reading-lamp and the fire.

They did not notice him; and Madeline, who was still slightly breathless, and had evidently been dancing, cast herself into a low armchair, and said, as she began to wield her fan,—

"Well, here I am! I have kept the tryst. What is it?" rather irritably.

"You can guess," said her companion, seating himself more deliberately with his back to Hugh.

"Oh!"—scornfully—"the old thing—money!"

"You have hit it, Miss Grant, with your usual intelligence."

"And how much this time?"

"Another thousand," crossing his legs coolly as he spoke.

"Another thousand! Heaven and earth! You must be mad to ask for it. One would imagine that a thousand pounds was as easily procured as half-a-crown. You have had more than half my yearly allowance as it is, and so many of my diamonds that my father begins to be suspicious. I cannot possibly let you have a thousand pounds, or anything like it."

"Your father is reputed to have thirty thousand a-year. It's a fleabite to him, my dear, and you must get it by hook or by crook. A young lady who has managed to hoodwink him so completely for years can surely contrive to get this little advance. I've been uncommonly hard hit over racing this season, and money I must have, or I shall be posted. You, perhaps, don't know what that means? But sooner than that should happen I should be obliged to have recourse to my very last card, one I do not wish to play, unless you force my hand."

"And, pray, what is that card?" inquired Madeline, shortly.

"To sell my secret—our secret—to your guileless parent."

"Our secret! Oh! what folly, what madness ever tempted me to entrust it to a wretch like you! Have I not your solemn promise?"

"My promise must occasionally be forgone."

"You have the baseness to say so! Have I not stopped your mouth over and over again with money?"

The feelings of Hugh Glyn as he listened to this conversation may be better imagined than described.

He had tried to speak more than once, but he had been literally petrified by what he heard.

He looked at Madeline, he looked at her colleague—Madeline, cold and scornful now; the other, bargaining, like the basest of villains that he was!

What was their secret? He would wring it from the scoundrel's lips.

Needless to say that both started when Mr. Glyn came suddenly and stood on the hearth-rug between them.

They had no idea that he had been a listener. The library carpet was a thick, soft Turkey—footfalls died away on it.

He had just arrived, of course, and, quickly recovering their self-command, they looked at him suspiciously in silence for a moment.

"How you startled us, Glyn! You come in like one of the ghosts we were hearing about," said Lord Robert. "Miss Grant and I came in here to rest for a few moments away from those insatiable dancers outside and those frantic pipes."

"I think I should tell you that I have been

here all the time," returned the other, leaning against the mantelpiece to steady himself as he spoke, and speaking in a strange, repressed voice.

Lord Robert showed unmistakable signs of astonishment and discomfiture, and there were some seconds of an awkward pause. Then Hugh spoke again.

"You and Miss Grant possess a secret in common apparently, and your price is a thousand pounds. Supposing—not once looking at Madeline—"that you sell it to me!"

Lord Robert looked at him sharply. Loathing contempt and instinctive dislike revealed themselves plainly in Mr. Glyn's look and speech. Then he said,—

"Twelve hundred if you like!"

"It would be of no use to you," he said, with a lowering brow. "Miss Grant's father will find it worth having; he is my market!"

"Whether he is or not, you will tell it to me before you leave this room!" said Hugh, fiercely, "or you don't leave it alive!"

"My good man, don't excite yourself! What on earth have you to say to me or to Miss Grant and her affairs? This much you may know—her secret concerns another man presumably young—eb, Miss Grant, and good-looking! In short, her lover!"

Hugh literally quivered with suppressed fury. He turned and looked at Madeline for the first time, and there was a flash in his eye that fairly frightened her.

"Hugh," she said, springing up quickly, and placing her hand on his arm, "do not look at me like that; do not dare to do it," speaking in short gasps, her heart was beating so quickly. "It—is—it our secret that is in possession of this wretch. He is the only one that knows it," pointing a trembling finger at Lord Robert as she spoke.

"He knows it, and how!"

"I was forced to tell him. He tried to carry me off, to elope with me, against my will last year, from a picnic. He pretended the horse was lame; he took me to a farm-house thinking to compromise me; and then I was forced to tell him all, and to bribe him heavily to silence. He has been a nightmare to me ever since," speaking passionately out of a full heart. "He has forced me to be civil to him, when he knows that I loathe him—to smile on him, to dance with him, when his look and touch makes me shudder. He levies his blackmail; often he wrings it from me by his threats. You have heard him to-night."

She paused, breathless, staggered back to her seat, and, burying her face in her hands, burst into tears.

Just at this moment Flo, the peering, the ubiquitous, the sly, came to the door unseen, and looked in. One moment sufficed for her to take a mental photograph of the scene and glide away. She saw Mr. Glyn facing her, pale as death, seemingly dispensing judgment to two culprits. Lord Robert Montagu, who sat with bowed head, arms folded, and eyes fixed doggedly on the floor, he was one. The other was Madeline, who, stricken apparently with some heavy remorse, was dissolved in tears. What in the world did it mean? There were a good many things of which Miss Blunt would like to know the meaning.

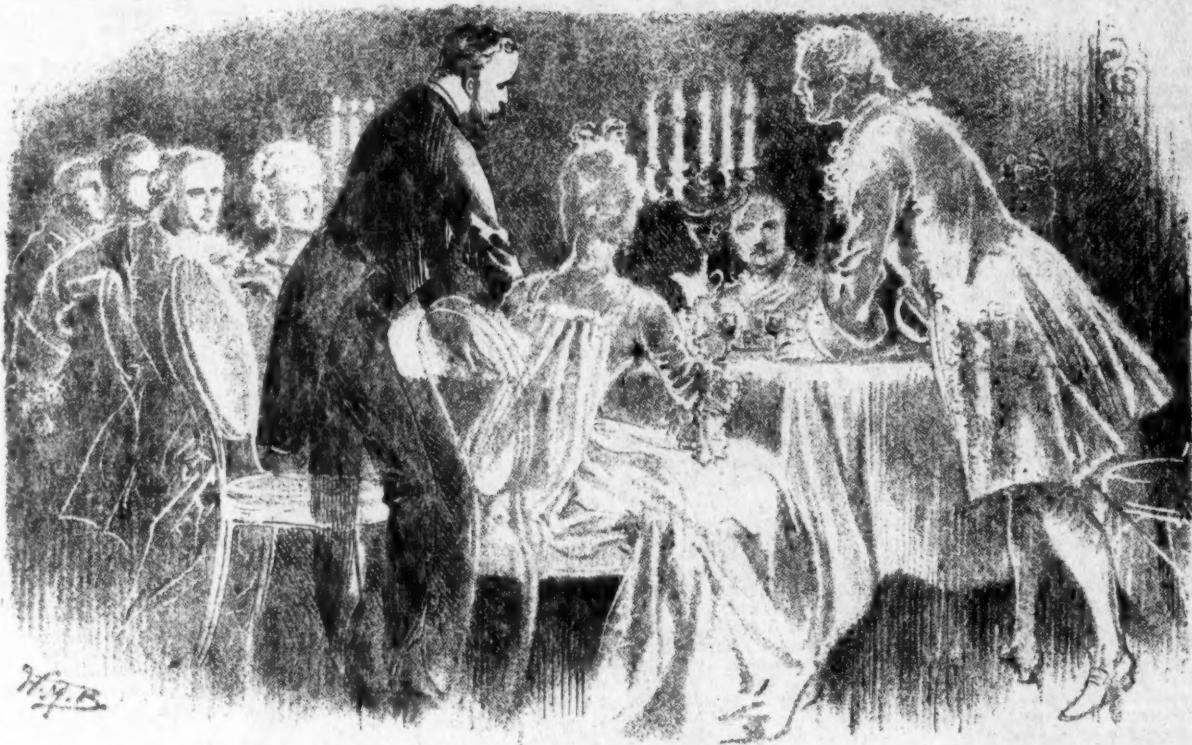
Suddenly Lord Robert raised his head, and gazing at his rival as like a wild beast brought to bay, said, hoarsely,—

"And who are you? What have you to do with Miss Grant? Are you the mysterious, fabulous—but no, you can't be!"

"I am Miss Grant's husband, if that is what you mean. I married her before her father returned to England," said Mr. Glyn, emphatically.

"I don't believe you," returned Lord Robert, brutally. "You may call yourself what you like. Where are your proofs? A likely story that she, pointing to his hooters, "is Mrs. Glyn. Why you don't even speak."

"That is no proof against our being man and wife; in fact it's rather on our side," said Mr. Glyn, bitterly. "But there is no occasion to trouble ourselves about persuading you into anything beyond leaving Dunkern before break-



BEFORE THE ASSEMBLED GHOSTS I THERE AND THEN LOUDLY REPEATED A GRACE.

fast to-morrow morning, which I shall take care that you do."

"I leave Dunearn! I like your impudence! It is you, my brave son-in-law, whom Mr. Grant will drive forth. By George! if what you say is true, what a game you and she have played!" indicating the still weeping Madeline with a sweeping gesture of his hand. "But the said game is up, I can assure you, Mr. and Mrs. Glyn, Mr. Grant shall have his eyes opened before another twenty-four hours have gone over his head."

"But not by you," said Mr. Glyn, his eyes flashing with disdain.

"By whom, then?" with a savage sneer.

"By me."

Lord Robert uttered an exclamation of contemptuous surprise, and pulled his long yellow moustache.

"Yes, by me, this very night; there is no other alternative; and there are very strong reasons—one of them represented by you—that there should be no more delay. "Madeline," glancing at his wife, "you see that in the end your promised duty falls on me," and walking across the room he opened the door and went out.

"Do you mean to tell me that that fellow is your husband?" said Lord Robert, standing up and approaching Madeline, who was now drying her eyes.

"That gentleman is my husband!" she said, with a flush in her eye.

"Dear me!"—ironically,—“what a delightful surprise for Mr. Grant this announcement will be! Three years he has been the happy possessor of a son-in-law, and not been aware of the fact; and for two you have been able to tear yourself away from that paragon of men who has just left us!"

"Spare your sneers, Lord Robert! The wrong in keeping the marriage a secret from my father was all mine. It was against Hugh's wish always. For that reason we have quarrelled, or rather, he has let me go my own way, and given me my liberty. But I do not want it. I would—

yes," suddenly looking round the sumptuously furnished library, "give up everything—everything that I lived myself for—money, dress, jewels, fashion, friends—and live on bread and cheese with Hugh if he would only forgive me."

"No doubt you will have an early opportunity of testing your ambition. If I know Mr. Grant he will lose no time in presenting his daughter—who has so long imposed on him—with the key of the street, and will have Miss Grant's husband kicked off the premises," he added, vindictively.

"I am not so sure of that, sir," said Madeline, rising and putting her hair back; "but I am sure of one thing, and that is, that before I leave my father's eyes shall be opened to your conduct," she added, in a voice so low and suppressed as to be scarcely audible. "Never," she added, with an impudent wave of the hand, "presume to speak to me again!"

"Never—presume! Ah! ah! A good joke! Do you know what you are saying, madam? You, the daughter of a low-born upstart. Presume, indeed! If your father had not made his coin by wringing it out of the miserable niggers do you imagine anyone would have received such a little nob as he is, or looked at you?"

The end of this gentlemanly speech was lost, was solely addressed to the heavy black oak furniture, for Madeline had left him, and returned to face the remainder of the guests with what composure she might summon to her aid, knowing as she did that in her father's sanctum at that very time the crisis of her fate had arrived, and her future course was being decided without any reference to her.

She felt that she was in the proverbial position of the person who fell between two stools. If her father thrust her out of doors she could not go to Hugh; if Hugh turned his back upon her her father would not receive her. She had sinned against them both, and Nemesis had overtaken her at last.

If she had clung to Hugh she would have had a refuge now; but supposing that her father

had, justly infuriated, spurned her, and sent her forth penniless, what was to become of her?

With this momentous question in her mind no wonder that the guests remarked upon her scared, white face, and absent, ill-timed answers.

Mr. Grant, Mr. Glyn, and Lord Robert Montagu did not reappear among the company that evening.

(To be continued.)

THE time-honoured scheme of rolling up a piece of paper and using it for a lighter has been utilised by an inventor in the manufacture of matches. The new matches are considerably cheaper than wooden matches, and weigh much less, a fact which counts for much in the exportation. The sticks of these matches consist of paper rolled together on the bias. The paper is rather strong and porous, and when immersed in a solution of wax and similar substances will easily stick together and burn with a bright, smokeless, and odourless flame. Strips of half-an-inch in width are first drawn through the combustible mass spoken of above, and then turned by machinery into long thin tubes, pieces of the ordinary length of wood or wax matches being cut off automatically by the machine.

"The Science of Cleaning and the Secret of Health" is the title of a pamphlet recently issued by Messrs. Lever Bros., Port Sunlight, Birkenhead, and containing invaluable information for every housewife. In Part I, full and detailed particulars are given as to how washing day can be made less of a burden than it often is, and also hints for Starching, Ironing, and Mangling clothes. Part II, is devoted to house cleaning, and besides emphasising the importance of the care necessary to be observed in the cleaning of bedrooms, contains many useful recipes that every head of a household would do well to be familiar with.



ELIZA SHIVERED AND SHOWED CAREW HER WOUNDED LEFT HAND.

THE HEIRESS OF WYNDCLIFF.

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CHAPTER IV.

A CURIOUS ADVENTURE.

CONSIDERABLY startled, Elaine and her companion looked round to see if there was a third occupant of the chapel, but no one was visible; neither was the sound that had alarmed them repeated.

"It could not have been fancy, since we both heard it," observed the young girl, turning her puzzled eyes on Carew. "Is it possible people can have found their way to the vaults beneath?"

"In that case they would hear us calling, and—if they wanted help—would respond," he answered, and then, in a loud clear voice, he shouted, "If there is anyone requiring assistance let him call out."

They waited for the response to this appeal, but apparently there was none forthcoming. Utter silence, broken only by the twittering of the birds outside, met them, and after lingering some little time longer they left the chapel. Elaine breathed a deep sigh of relief as she found herself outside.

"There was something oppressive in the very atmosphere of that place," she murmured, shivering; "what do you think could have produced the sound we heard?"

"An animal most likely, that had got hurt."

"It could not have been human being!"

"Oh, no," he answered, reassuringly, "certainly not. In the first place, a human being could not have got below the chapel without someone knowing it, and secondly, he would have answered when I called. If you had travelled as much as I have, Miss Wyndcliff, you would have heard lots of sounds for which you could offer no explanation, no natural one, I mean."

She looked at him quickly.

"You surely don't believe in the supernatural!"

An expression she could not fathom came in his eyes.

"I am not quite sure. I only know that there are occurrences in every man's life—and in every woman's too, I expect—which defy all ordinary interpretations."

Elaine looked rather troubled; and walked beside him in silence until they reached the terrace. Then she said,--

"Shall we go to the wood now, or have you had enough adventures for the morning?"

"Certainly not," he responded, smiling. "Adventure is the very breath of my nostrils, without which I find lifeavourless. But I have changed my mind on one point. I shall not let you come with me."

"Why not?"

"Because there might be danger. I don't think there is, only you must be allowed to run no risk whatever. If you will tell me how to identify the spot where you saw this strange animal I will go there myself, and hunt about for traces of it."

"But what about *your* danger?"

The idea had not struck him, and he laughed aloud, as if he found it amusing. From his pocket he drew a small revolver, whose silver barrels gleamed in the sunlight.

"This is my talisman, a very effectual one, as you will confess. I always carry it about with me."

"Even when you are in England?"

"Yes, it has become force of habit, I suppose."

A shadow fell on the white marble of the terrace, and looking up, they saw the secretary behind them, paler than usual, or so it struck Carew.

"Sir Richard is asking for you, Miss Wyndcliff," he said, without looking at her as he addressed her. "He awaits you in his study."

The young girl ran off, with a nod and a smile to Carew. Hilliard waited a second, as if under the impression that Gerard might address him, but finding himself mistaken, he quietly with-

drew, followed by glances the reverse of amiable from Carew.

"What on earth makes me dislike him so much!" the young man muttered, as he restored the revolver to his pocket, and at the same time became aware that the rose he had placed in his buttonhole before breakfast had disappeared. He remembered noticing it while in the chapel, and decided he must have dropped it there. He would go and see if he could find it again, for had not Elaine picked it, and was it not therefore sacred?"

He returned to the chapel, the key of which was still in his pocket; it turned harshly in the rusty lock, telling of the little usage it was accustomed to. Carew's quick eye in search of the flower swept the uneven surface of the stone floor, which was here and there inlaid with brass-tablets to the memory of those who slept beneath; yes, there lay the rosebud close to the altar, on the very spot where he and Elaine had stood listening.

He picked it up, and was about replacing it in his coat when he noticed a stain on it—the deep, red stain of blood. The sight gave him a strange horror, and involuntarily he dropped the rose.

How, and in what fashion had blood fallen upon it? It was the first flower Elaine had given him, and it seemed a bad omen that it should be thus defiled.

Rather hastily he left the chapel, and took his way to the wood. Elaine had mentioned a lightning-struck tree growing near the spot where she had been so startled in the morning, and this proved a sufficient guide for him.

With the keen eyes of a trained hunter he bent down to examine the earth, bushes, and fallen leaves in the vicinity. When he rose there was a half incredulous look on his face, and he stood for some moments contemplating the mark of a footprint, the like of which he had certainly never thought to see in an English forest.

However, there it was, clear and distinct, and, keeping a careful watch on all sides the while, he followed the spoor until he came to a high wall

on the outskirts of the wood, which seemed to surround the gardens of a house, whose chimneys were just visible above it. Carew made a circuit of this wall, which was in no part less than eight feet high, and whose only entrance seemed to be a postern-door, thickly studded with cut iron nails.

It was in front of this door that the footprints of the animal he had been tracking ceased, thus implying that it must have been let into the garden at this point.

Carew looked up at the wall and debated with himself. He did not quite relish the idea of ringing the long iron bell and stating the object of his visit to any servant who might answer his summons; on the other hand he was not the man to give up a purpose at the first obstacle, or to go back to Elaine and confess himself nonplussed.

As he stood thinking he could not help being struck by the utter silence that seemed to brood over the buildings confronting him. Not a sound broke it, no merry chatter of children or servants' voices, no clucking of cocks and hens, or other country noises. Everything was still as the grave itself, until, all in a minute, a deep growl, low and menacing, struck across it.

Instantly Carew was on the alert. He had heard that sound before in the tropic hush of jungles, and he knew what it meant. It came from a short distance to his right, divided from him by the wall, which at that point was partially covered with large, thick-stemmed ivy.

In another minute he had dragged himself up by the aid of the ivy and reached the coping, being by this means able to obtain a good view of the garden below.

One quick glance showed him it was wild and uncultivated; trees and shrubs had shot up into rank luxuriance, weeds had choked the flower borders, moss and green stains covered the gravel paths; the house itself was the picture of desolation.

But he had not much time left for observation of all these details, his attention being instantly riveted on a scene that was taking place within a few yards of him—a scene that but for his own prompt appearance might have developed into a tragedy.

On the path beneath the over-arching branches of trees stood a young woman, with the broken half of a heavy chain in her hand; her attitude was one of helpless, frozen horror, and her eyes were fixed on a more than half-grown panther crouching within a few yards of her, his blazing eyes holding hers, his tail lashing the gravel furiously, while he waited apparently in expectation of her next movement.

She swerved a little, perhaps half giddy with the strain, and this was the signal for him to spring.

A low, shuddering cry broke from her lips. She saw what her fate was to be, and closed her eyes in her despair. The next moment the sharp report of a revolver woke the echoes of the deserted old garden, followed by another and yet another.

Carew was too wary a sportsman to trust to one bullet only, although his first had gone clean through the beast's brain. Experience had taught him the value of making assurance doubly sure in such cases as these.

The girl opened her eyes, and saw bending over her a handsome, grey-eyed stranger, while a foot or two away lay the great satin-skinned body of the panther—quite still and harmless now. She looked at it a minute, then back at Carew, and taking his hand in hers, raised it to her lips.

"Did great Vishnu send you down from Heaven to save my life?" she asked, and Carew started in amazement to hear the Hindoo deity spoken of with perfect seriousness, in a land where, except by the few, his very name and attributes are unknown. He looked at her with more attention than he had hitherto bestowed on her, and then an explanation of the mystery flashed across him, for evidently Indian blood ran in her veins, although she was much fairer than the majority of her countrywomen. Moreover, she was very beautiful—beautiful enough to set any man's pulses throbbing the

faster while she looked at him with those great soft brown eyes of hers, and held his hand between her small taper fingers. She was dressed in European garb, except for a veil of some darkly transparent stuff, bordered with gold, which she wore on her head, and which fell gracefully over her shoulders. Her figure was tall and stately, and there was in her whole demeanour a certain imperial air of command, which convinced the young man that she must be of high rank in her native land. But what brought her here, under such circumstances?

Perhaps she divined something of what was passing in his mind, for with one shuddering glance at the dead panther she beckoned Carew to accompany her to the house.

Here a great surprise awaited him. Ruinous and half falling to pieces as the outside looked, the interior was a dream of luxury. A white garbed Oriental stood near the door, silent and immovable as a statue, the hall itself was covered with rugs of the richest and softest velvet, the walls screened with silken hangings, the windows shaded by brightly dyed curtains. Birds in gilded cages, and flowers in crystal vases, stood on pedestals, while in the middle a small fountain of scented water plashed musically in its basin, and scented the air with a delicious Eastern fragrance—langorous and enervating.

Passing through the hall, the girl led the way to an inner apartment, yet more gorgeously furnished, and motioned him to a couch, while she seated herself on a pile of cushions near.

"You would ask me how the panther came to be loose, is it not so?" she said, the splendour of her dark eyes still fixed on his face. Then, as he answered in the affirmative, "I will tell you. He was given to me when he was a few weeks old—his mother was killed—and I liked him as a plaything, and determined to try the experiment of training him. I thought I had succeeded. He learned to know my voice, to listen for my footsteps, he was gentle and playful as a kitten. Still, I always kept him chained up until this morning, when he got loose, and strayed into the wood there"—pointing to it with her finger. "I followed, and was just in time to find him and bring him back. But I discovered that during his hour of liberty he had killed a lamb, and torn it to pieces. I suppose this roused the savageness of his nature, but he allowed me to bring him home and chain him up again. A little while ago I went to feed him, and found he had again broken loose from his chain. I put my hand out, and patted him as was my wont, and he licked it, but so roughly that the blood came." She shivered, and showed him her wounded left hand, which up to now had been hidden in the folds of her veil. "Then I think I grew frightened, for the taste of blood had changed him from a docile pet to his native ferocity. He turned, and was on the point of attacking me, when you came to save me. How did you know I was in danger?"

"I heard the animal growling, and so I scaled the wall," he replied, and she asked him no further questions as to what brought him to the house. Indeed, she seemed to take for granted, quite simply, that his coming was the result of some providential inspiration specially exercised on her behalf.

"Do you live here?" he asked, letting his eye wander round curiously.

She nodded.

"But you have not been here long!" he went on, thinking that if they had known they had such a strange neighbour Sir Richard, or Elaine would have been sure to mention the circumstance.

"Not long."

There was a brevity in these answers that made Carew suspect his questions were not very welcome. Nevertheless, he went on.

"I am staying at Wyndcliff Castle. Perhaps you know the Wyndcliffs!"

Some subtle change—he could hardly describe it even to himself—passed over her face, but there was no hesitation in her reply.

"I do not know them. I know none of my neighbours, neither do I wish to know them. It is seldom I venture beyond these grounds which the wall you scaled bounds, and I receive no

visitors, I shall make an exception in your favour. Whenever you come you will be permitted to enter, and welcomed."

This was said with the graciousness of an empress conferring a favour, of whose reception she had no doubt. And yet mingled with it was another emotion, sweeter, gentler, more womanly. Her eyes sought his, and Carew was angry with himself inasmuch as he felt a slight red mounting to his cheek.

"You are very good," he murmured. "You have not told me your name yet."

"My name is Heera. When you come to the gate you will give three pulls at the hanging bell in quick succession, and it will be an open sesame. But there is one thing I demand of you, and it is that you mention to no one that you have been here—that you keep my presence secret. Will you promise?"

Somewhat bewildered, he gave the required promise, and Heera clapped her hands, in answer to which signal the white robed servant entered. She, addressing him in Hindustani, ordered him to bring fruits and ices—for the morning was unusually hot. Directly he had departed she turned and looked at Carew.

"You understood what I said—I see it in your face," she exclaimed, quickly, and perhaps with a shade of annoyance. "Tell me how you learned my language."

He replied that he had travelled a good deal in the East, and though he was not given to talking of his achievements, she contrived to obtain from him a fairly exhaustive sketch of his career. Afterwards he was angry with himself—when the spell of her presence was removed—but while he was with her it seemed quite natural to let her ask him what question she would. At last, however, he rose, and glanced at his watch; he was rather dismayed to find how late it was.

"They will be wondering what has become of me," he observed, as he wished her good-bye.

"They!" Who are 'they'?" she asked, with a swift resentment which amused him.

"Sir Richard Wyndcliff and his daughter."

"What is the daughter like—is she beautiful?"

"Very," briefly responded Carew, who, strange to say, was rather annoyed at the question.

Perhaps Heera saw this, and was prevented by it from pursuing the subject. As her visitor was going out, while the Hindoo servant held the curtain aside for him to pass through, she said in English,—

"You will come and see me again soon!" and at his affirmative answer she smiled.

CHAPTER V.

A DECLARATION.

CAREW felt considerably puzzled as he pursued his way towards the Castle, for he foresaw difficulties which might arise in consequence of the promise Heera had obtained from him. Elaine would be sure to ask the result of his mission, and he hated having to conceal anything from her. Still, on the other hand, he must keep faith with the beautiful foreigner who had aroused both his interest and his curiosity.

What had brought her here, living in a ruinous old house, and yet surrounded with all the magnificence of Oriental luxury, and why was she anxious her presence should remain a secret?

These wonderings were chased from his mind as he entered the grounds of the Castle by the sight of Elaine coming to meet him, and looking whiter than usual.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come back!" she exclaimed, stopping while the colour returned to her cheeks. "When luncheon time came and you had not arrived I grew so frightened. I thought something had happened to you, and if it had it would have been my fault! I was on my way to the wood to look for you. You are sure you are not hurt?"

"Quite sure," and he smiled into her upturned eyes; "but it was very good of you to think so much of my welfare."

A deep blush swept across the fairness of her face.

—almost painful in its intensity. She drew a little farther back from him, and her manner, when she spoke next, was not free from a faint tinge of reserve. He saw that he had made a mistake. Her girlish modesty was alarmed—she was afraid she had done wrong in letting him see her apprehension on his behalf.

"I have something to tell you," he went on, quickly, in order to reassure her. "You will not be troubled by the sight of the monster who terrified you this morning. He is dead."

"Dead! who killed him?"

"I did, by means of the little toy I showed you just now. It was a panther, one that had evidently escaped from confinement. They are savage beasts, almost as bad as tigers, and my impression is that they are untamable, though I have heard of instances to the contrary."

"But where did it come from?" asked Elaine, very naturally. Then, as Gerard simply shrugged his shoulders by way of reply, she added, "I thought panthers were Indian animals of the leopard tribe."

"They are found in India, in Africa, and even in Persia, and they vary in size tremendously, as they do in colour. There are black leopards, spotted leopards, and even white ones, though they are rare. This special animal was a spotted one, but it was not fully grown; or you might have fared rather worse at its hands when it met you. Thank Heaven, it was so!" he added, proudly.

By this time they had reached the terrace, when they were met by Sir Richard, who looked worn and worried, and was accompanied by a tall, rather stout man, with a reddish face, who stared insolently at Elaine, and then whispered something to the Baronet.

The latter started, bit his lip, and with evident reluctance called his daughter.

"Elaine, this gentleman wishes to be introduced to you. Mr. Transome—Miss Wyndcliff."

The young girl bowed, and professed not to notice the hand extended by her new acquaintance, who, to judge by the rings he wore, and his heavy watch-chain, seemed to have a weakness for jewellery.

He was not a bad-looking man—he was even handsome, after a florid common-place style; but there could be no doubt that he was intensely vulgar, and Elaine took the first opportunity of escaping from him.

"I wonder who he can be, and why papa allows him to come here," she said, as she rejoined Carew, who had waited in the hall for her. "I have never spoken to him before; but I have seen him once or twice, and after each visit papa seems to be so depressed and wretched. I have often puzzled over what his business is."

She was destined to know—too soon, alas!

In the afternoon she and Lady Alma and Gerard drove off in the pony carriage to a ruin some three miles away, where they arranged a picnic.

Sir Richard was to have been included in the party, but he excused himself, and as Lady Alma was provided with a novel in which she professed to take the deepest interest it followed that the two young people were thrown a good deal into each other's society; and one of them, at least, thoroughly enjoyed it.

The afternoon was perfect, the sun shone in a sky of fleckless blue, the foliage, just touched by autumn's gorgeous finger, blazed in all the splendour of gold and scarlet, a faint blue haze enwrapped the distant hills. In the orchards damsons were ripening, apples crimsoning amongst their green leaves, wreaths of briony twined their clustered red berries in the hedges, the air was soft and balmy as a caress.

Two or three hours' uninterrupted converse in such a scene and under such conditions did more towards perfecting an intimacy than as many weeks of ordinary intercourse, and Carew found it difficult to believe that two days ago he had known Elaine only by name.

They returned home by a different route, and on their way passed a high grey wall, above which one or two chimneys were visible.

Gerard recognised it at once as the front of the house he had visited that morning, and it was

with a certain awkwardness that he asked his companion who lived there.

"No one," she answered at once. "It is called the Rookery; but I believe even the rocks have deserted it now. It has been unoccupied ever since I can remember, in consequence of the last owner having committed suicide there. I think I have heard there is a caretaker; but even of that I am not sure. Does it not look prison-like with that insurmountable wall all round?"

"Does it belong to your father?"

"No. Its owner is some one in London; I forget his name. It joins my father's property, and I have sometimes wondered he did not buy it, but he has never tried to do so."

The fact was money was not too plentiful at Wyndcliff Castle, and though Sir Richard had contrived to disguise this fact fairly well it effectively prevented him from trying to add to his estate.

When they got back to the Castle they found Mr. Transome still there, and Sir Richard announced that he would extend his visit for two or three days.

Lady Alma put up her glasses, and stared at the new comer in the insolent fashion highly-bred ladies occasionally affect, after which she did not condescend to take the smallest notice of him, and as during the evening Elaine was appropriated by Carew, it followed that the stranger had to depend on Sir Richard himself for entertainment.

"What a horrid man!" exclaimed Lady Alma to her nephew, as she was bidding him good-night; and she pointed with her fan in the direction of Transome. "I don't think he can have found it very lively here to-night—perhaps he will curtail his visit in consequence."

But in this hope she was disappointed, for at the end of a week he was still at the Castle, and showed no signs of departure.

His time was mostly spent in walking about the estate accompanied by Sir Richard, who grew each day more careworn and harassed.

The writing of his book was at a standstill, though the secretary was busily engaged in making the necessary notes and quotations for it—an occupation which he seemed to find entirely engrossing, for he rarely left the library, except at mealtimes.

Gerard, meanwhile, had kept a pretty keen watch on him, which for three or four days had been without result. On the fifth night, however, an episode occurred with which he felt convinced Hilliard had something to do.

Carew was an extremely light sleeper, and moreover had got into the habit of reading in bed, so that it often happened he did not get to sleep until two or three o'clock in the morning. On this special night he was lying awake, when his ear was caught by the faintest possible sound of someone moving outside in the passage.

He had left off reading and put his light out, so the room was in complete darkness; moreover the door was unlocked, and Gerard's hand moved softly to the revolver which lay in its case on the table by his bedside.

He had an idea someone was on the point of entering the room, and in order to put them off their guard he simulated the deep and regular breathing of a sleeping man.

However, the minutes passed by and no other sound followed, and nearly half-an-hour had elapsed before he rose quietly, slipped on some clothes, and very cautiously went into the corridor, which was deserted and quiet as the grave—as was indeed the rest of the house.

After a moment's hesitation he stole downstairs, thinking it was most probable the secretary who had left the house, and determined to see what his object was.

He decided that Hilliard would not risk the big front door, but would in all likelihood make use of the small postern on the east side of the Castle, and towards this he accordingly went.

On his way he had to pass a room, which Elaine, when she had showed him over the house, had told him was kept locked, inasmuch as it contained all the family documents, and an old muniment chest which, she said, he ought to see on account of its antiquity.

"But," she added, "papa always keeps the

key locked up, and hardly ever enters the room, while I have only been in it about three times in my life."

To Carew's great astonishment, as he passed the room he saw a faint line of light issuing from beneath the door!

It disappeared, and after an interval showed itself again, thus convincing the watcher that it proceeded from a dark lantern.

The young man put his ear to the keyhole and listened intently—he could see nothing, for the aperture had been carefully covered over with some material which effectually screened it—but presently he caught the faint echo of whispered voices. Then there must be two people within!

Carew did not take long to make up his mind. Sir Richard must know what was going on under his roof; moreover, if he proceeded with caution he might trap the delinquents.

In another few minutes he had awoke the baronet, and briefly given him the position of affairs.

At first Sir Richard was incredulous, declaring that the lock of the room was a very peculiar one, and impossible to force, and that the key had never once left his possession; nevertheless he prepared to accompany the young man downstairs, and presently they both stood in front of the door, which he proceeded to open.

To Gerard's consternation the room was empty.

Sir Richard turned to him with a half-annoyed, half-amused smile.

"You have been dreaming, Carew. I thought it was a strange thing if an entrance had been effected. Besides, what would burglars want to get in here for? There is no money, or anything valuable for them to take away—nothing but a musty old lot of letters and papers."

Gerard did not relish being made a fool of any more than other people; he ground his teeth in silent rage, acknowledging that at the present moment he occupied that unenviable position.

"It's that confounded secretary of yours!" he exclaimed, angrily. "He's up to some mischief here. I'm sure of it."

"What Hilliard!" queried the baronet, looking displeased. "He's the most obliging and best-tempered fellow in the world, quite incapable of mischief of any kind. Still we can easily put your suspicion to the proof by going to his room and seeing if he is there."

They did so, and found the secretary fast asleep. After that Gerard felt he could say no more; so he parted from his host in a temper far from amiable, and went back to bed again, muttering to himself,—

"All right, Mr. Hilliard! You have scored a point this time, but next time you won't be so fortunate, perhaps?" For, in spite of having seen the secretary in bed, he felt pretty sure that it was he who had been in the muniment room, and, moreover, with a companion. As to his companion's identity, it was of course impossible to hazard a guess.

The next morning, when they met at breakfast, not a word was said regarding the night's adventure. Hilliard was calm and inscrutable as usual, and apparently unconscious that he was being watched narrowly by Carew, while Sir Richard himself seemed annoyed at his guest's "effrontery," as he termed it to himself. Mr. Transome was loud and "jolly," and appeared to take a particular pleasure in addressing remarks to Lady Alma, although her manner was of the coldest, and her replies the briefest. Elaine, vaguely conscious of some elements of discord which had arisen in their midst, was very quiet.

After the meal was over she slipped away, as was her custom, to look after her flowers in the conservatory, and hither, in a little while, Gerard followed her. He found her bending over a tuberous, looking herself as fair and fresh as some tall, white lily.

"This plant is really going to blossom at last. I was beginning to despair of it," she said to him, gaily. "In a week it will have a full-blown flower."

"Which I, alas! shall not be here to see," he remarked, watching her keenly so as to lose no change of expression on her part.

She started, and he fancied grew a shade paler.

"But why are you going so soon?" she asked, trifling with a spray of heliotrope she had picked, and scattering its scented petals on the tessellated tiles with which the conservatory was paved, while the rich fringes of her lids swept her cheeks and hid her eyes.

"Soon do you call it? I shall have been here nearly a fortnight, and I believe my aunt has made arrangements to go to Scotland. So far as I am concerned the time has passed swiftly as a dream—I wish it had all come over again!"

He spoke with such fervour that a faint colour mantled in her cheek, and she did not answer quite directly. When she did her voice was rather tremulous.

"I am glad you have enjoyed your visit to Wyndcliff."

"And—may I flatter myself, that you will miss me when I am gone?"

He had come nearer, so near that his arm touched her dress, and he could see the quick rise and fall of her bosom. His heart thrilled with exultant rapture, and when she remained silent he put his hand on her shoulder, and turned his face towards him.

"Elaine—darling—speak to me—tell me I am not presumptuous in hoping that you have learned to care for me a little! For I love you with my whole heart, I ask for nothing better than to devote my life to your service. Ah, darling, darling, words are weak when a man puts his whole heart in them—they cannot convey one tithe of what I really feel. You are the first woman I have ever loved, and you will be the last!"

He felt her tremble in his grasp. Very slowly she lifted her bowed head, and in her face he read his answer.

Then came to both that breath of the "rose of Paradise," which comes to all of us, once in our lives—and once only!

CHAPTER VI.

THE PREDICTION.

THAT same afternoon Carew sought Sir Richard in the library, and boldly asked him for his daughter's hand. Strange as it may appear, the baronet seemed surprised, for though Lady Alma had seen very clearly how things were drifting he had been too engrossed in his own private worries to pay much attention to the love affair enacted under his eyes.

Gerard could not flatter himself that he was pleased, either, for after listening to the young man's speech he got up from the chair and began restlessly to pace the room.

"It is impossible, quite impossible," he exclaimed at last. "Elaine must marry a rich man, and you do not come under that denomination."

"My income is over a thousand a-year, which though it cannot be called wealth is not exactly poverty," the young man returned, growing red under his tan. "Besides, I don't think the question of money entered into our calculation. We love each other too well for that."

"There are other things in the world besides love. Elaine at my death will be the sole representative of the Wyndcliff family, and she must be wealthy enough to keep up her position. No, Carew. I like you very well, and under other circumstances would welcome you for my son-in-law, but as matters are at present I must absolutely decline your proposal."

And in spite of all Gerard's entreaties he remained firm on the point, and the young man retreated almost in despair. But it was at this crisis Elaine showed the stuff she was made of.

When she had heard her lover's account of the interview in the library she grew pale indeed, but there was an expression of stedfast resolution in her face that somehow altered the character of it—turned her from a child into a woman. As he finished speaking she came and put her two hands on his shoulders.

"To me," she said, quietly, "love is the greatest power in the world, and I cannot renounce it even at my father's command. If he will not let me marry you I must obey, but I

shall still continue to love you, and I will never become the wife of anyone else."

"My darling!" he cried, and he caught her to him, in a sudden fervent embrace, from which she presently disengaged herself to go to the library and plead her own cause with Sir Richard.

Her eloquence and determination startled her father. She had always been so docile that he was quite unprepared for her taking such a firm attitude; moreover, he saw that she meant every word she uttered.

"I do not want wealth," she said, in conclusion. "Money weighs very little in comparison with the love of a man like Gerard Carew."

She stopped at the sight of Sir Richard's haggard face, and came and knelt at his side, while she caught his hands in hers.

"Papa, darling, there is something behind all this which I cannot understand. Forgive me if I have spoken disobediently. I have not meant to do so. You know I would not grieve you for all the world if I could help it."

She ended with a half sob, and pressed her lips against his hand, which was wet with his tears.

"I know, I know, Elaine," he groaned, "you are the best daughter man ever had, and it goes to my heart to deny you anything, but if you only knew the position in which I find myself—"

"Tell me, papa," she interrupted eagerly. "Surely it is my right to share your sorrows."

At first he refused, but finally her entreaties prevailed, and he made a confession to which she listened with a dismay that she did her best to hide. She was silent for a few minutes after he ceased; then she said in a low tone,—

"You mean, then, that you are hopelessly in debt; that Wyndcliff Castle and all its estates are mortgaged to this Mr. Transome, and that we are liable at any moment to be turned out—homeless, penniless?"

He assented by a movement. Words would not come. He was a proud man, proud of his name, his family, his old home, and his up to now unblemished reputation. It seemed to him that at this moment he drained the cup of degradation to its dregs.

A moment later Elaine's arms were round his neck, his head was drawn down to her shoulder, her fresh young lips were pressed tenderly to his.

"Poor father, how you must have suffered! And you bore it all alone. It will be better now, for I shall share it with you. Tell me how it all happened."

It was simple enough. The estate was already burdened when Sir Richard succeeded to it, and with the idea of clearing it he had embarked in speculations which held out golden promises that were never fulfilled. Year after year his debts grew heavier, and now to get rid of them seemed hopeless.

"I have been as careful as I could," he exclaimed in self-extenuation. "We have lived very quietly; I have neither visited nor entertained. I should not have had Lady Alma here if she had not written and announced she was coming. After that it was impossible to put her off. If you only married a very rich man, Elaine, things might come right yet," he said, wistfully, and then he sighed at the look of distress that his words brought into his daughter's face.

She, meanwhile, was gathering up her energies to face the situation. It was a well-nigh desperate one, she confessed, but her courage did not fail. Presently she turned to her father with a faint smile.

"Do you remember the old prophecy, father? We have often laughed at it, but the first part, at any rate, seems to have come true," and she repeated the verse which had been handed down in the Wyndcliff family for generations—

"The Wyndcliff luck shall have abed away,
To the region of death, and grisly decay,
And the hand of a maiden, young and fair,
Shall track good fortune, and find it there."

"I'm sure I don't know why you repeat doggerel like that at such a serious moment," muttered Sir Richard, irritably.

"Do you call it 'doggerel' papa? It seemed to me to contain some hope for the future. Perhaps I am the maiden alluded to."

He caught eagerly at the suggestion.

"Perhaps so. It is in your power to retrieve the fortunes of the family, but you must give up Carew in order to do it. Shall I tell you a secret, Elaine? Mr. Transome is in love with you, and at a word of encouragement would be at your feet."

"That word will never be spoken," cried the girl hastily.

"I do not see why not. He is immensely wealthy, and only last night he told me that if you consented to become his wife, he would give you the title-deeds of Wyndcliff which he now holds, as your marriage gift. Think of it, Elaine. What a simple way out of our troubles! I did not intend mentioning this to you just yet; he and I agreed that it would be better to wait for a few months, as you are so young, but you have forced my hand by this affair with Carew. Won't you consent to give him up, Elaine?"

"Oh, papa, don't ask me that! Let us think over the situation quietly and calmly, leaving my marriage altogether out of it. I want you to explain to me exactly how things are. You have always said I had a clear head for business, and now you must let me prove it."

Hopelessly enough, he gave her the statement she asked for, and she was forced to confess that there was indeed no way of escape, short of leaving the Castle penniless, and seeing every acre of the estate pass into strange hands.

For some time she sat with her head bent in deep thought, then she said suddenly,—

"Haven't I heard you speak of some lost treasure of fabulous value that belonged to your mother, and which disappeared after her death? Is there no chance of our tracing it?"

He smiled—a very melancholy, half-hearted sort of smile, and shook his head; but the girl was not to be discouraged.

"Let me hear the story, papa. You have often promised to tell me, but have never really done so, and what I know I have picked up chiefly from local gossip. How is it you don't care to talk of my grandmother?"

"Because I was half afraid of her," he replied, candidly. "Although she was my mother I never felt that there was any sort of confidence between us. She died when I was very young; but I remember her perfectly. She was a very beautiful woman—in point of fact, you are her living image, Elaine. She was a widow when my father married her, and was always called the Ranea. Her first husband was an Indian Rajah, and at his death she escaped with some difficulty from his court, bringing with her a magnificent necklace of diamonds that had been given her by the prince. I recollect seeing her wear it once, and being perfectly dazzled by its splendour; and I remember, too, having a boyish impression that my father hated the sight of it. My mother was dressed in a gorgeous brocade gown ready for some country ball, the diamonds round her throat. In the centre of the necklace was an immense pinkish sort of jewel, which she told me had once been the eye of an Indian idol, and which was supposed to have the power of bringing a curse on any human owner."

"My father begged her to be silent when she said this, and he shuddered. That same night she returned from the ball stricken with fever, and a few days later she died. I remember his grief was terrible to witness. He did not long survive her, but when a search was made amongst his effects for the Indian diamonds, they could not be found. All the rest of the family jewels were intact, this set alone had disappeared, but on his death-bed he made some allusion to a paper he had written which had reference to it, and which would explain its mystery. That paper was lost, but the old solicitor who had charge of my father's affairs declared it to be his impression that the diamonds were somewhere beneath the roof of the Castle, and that their whereabouts would some time be discovered. Of course, he based his theory on the disjointed sentences that had fallen from my father's lips during his illness. Unfortunately

his prophecy has never been fulfilled, and we are as far off as ever from the hiding-place of the diamonds."

"What was their value?" asked Elaine, rather breathlessly.

"A hundred thousand pounds—enough to clear my estate from all its liabilities, and leave a very fair margin. But what is the use of taking it—the jewels are lost beyond all chance of recovery."

"Nothing of the sort, Papa!" exclaimed the girl, springing up, with sparkling eyes, and curious elation of mien. "I have a conviction that those diamonds will be found, and be the means of restoring our fallen fortunes. What does the prediction say?"

"The Wyndcliff luck shall have abed away—that represents the loss of the jewels and our subsequent difficulties."

"To the region of death and grim decay—I can't quite fathom that yet, but I shall later on, 'And the hand of a maiden, young and fair'—which I must take to mean myself—'Shall track good fortune, and find it there.' Why, papa, it is as plain as plain can be. Don't you see it?"

Before Sir Richard had time to reply a slight noise near the door attracted Elaine's attention. A screen was placed in front of it to keep off the draught, and it seemed to her as if this still vibrated with a touch that had been given it. She crossed the room swiftly, and was just in time to see the retreating figure of the secretary vanishing along the passage.

(To be continued.)

EVA'S LOVE.

—10—

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THREE are those persons—pitifully few and far between, it is true—who have the power of utter self-forgetfulness, the power of being happy in the happiness of others, and to this class Jack Anstruther belonged, if ever mortal did. It must have been to those like him of whom our Lord spoke, when he referred to "entertaining angels unawares."

Tofts was delighted when he saw his master's face, though what Madame Honora could have had to do with it he could not quite understand. He listened to their rather enigmatical conversation as she walked beside his chair, for she had refused a carriage, knowing it to be difficult for him.

"I am going to leave you here," he said, as they paused before Eva's door. "You will prefer to see her alone. But remember what I have said—I shall expect all the tears to be over upon my return at two. I am to be the sycophant on this occasion."

"Come with me," she urged, but he shook his head, smilingly.

"No," he answered. "I have another call to make."

She did not hesitate longer—she was too anxious for that, but ascended the steps. He waited until the servant had answered her ring. She smiled back at him, though he could see even at that distance that there were tears in her eyes, then he gave Tofts another address, and still wonderingly, but never questioning, Tofts trudged off, pushing the chair before him.

It was to Percy that Jack was going, not able to delay his precious news longer. He caught the young man as he was descending the step, and as Percy paused beside his chair, he exclaimed—

"I say, old man, I was just going to call upon you. It isn't often that I do the fashionable. Can't you come back for half an hour?"

"Is it anything particular, Jack? Because if it isn't I've an engagement that won't keep, and I will call upon you later in the day for a chat."

"You've got no engagement half so important as this," returned Jack. "Tofts will take me up, and then send a telegram for you or keep the appointment if needs be. I must see you," he exclaimed.

"Oh, very well. My engagement was with your sister, and—"

"Oh, hang my sister!" exclaimed Jack, inlegantly. "Besides, I've got no sister, and never had one. Take me up the steps, Tofts. I've just got hold of you in time, Percy, to prevent your making an infernal fool of yourself, and I am thankful for it."

"What do you mean?" inquired Percy.

But Jack set his lips resolutely and did not speak until Tofts had rolled his chair into Percy's sitting-room, then he looked up at his man with a frown that did not deceive Tofts as to his absolute good nature.

"Never mind about the telegram, Tofts. It will wait. Go anywhere you like, and come back in about half an hour." Then when the man had disappeared he turned to Percy, "Give me a cigar, will you, or a glass of brandy, or anything you like? I'm beginning to feel all tuckered out, as the old women say."

Percy went himself to a cupboard and got both, then seated himself opposite Jack, lighted a cigar, and looked at him through the blue clouds of smoke.

"When you are quite ready to relieve my curiosity, I shall be obliged," he said, indifferently. "It is natural that I should have a trifle after your words."

"Umph!" muttered Jack. "Look here. I hear you've been making an ass of yourself by proposing to Olga. Is that true?"

Percy moved uncomfortably.

"I believe—there is an—engagement," he stammered.

"Oh, I see! She has proposed to you. Well, I'm not so much surprised now. You must admit, old man, that after your confidential conversation with me in my studio that I have some small right to know the facts of the case. What are you going to do about marrying one woman, when your heart is irrevocably given to another?"

"That is dead and buried for ever!" exclaimed Percy, bitterly. "Eva has put an eternal barrier between herself and me, more potent far than the one that existed before. She is married."

Jack sat up very straight in his chair and looked at his companion hard and earnestly.

"When did that happen?" he inquired, sententiously.

"Yesterday at noon."

"Funny!" muttered Jack. "I happened to be with her yesterday at noon. She didn't look in the least like a bride. Fact is, she was under the doctor's care, and was lying on a sofa in a negligee gown, unable to get up."

"What are you talking about?" gasped Percy.

"I saw her again last night," continued Jack, imperturbably, "and she certainly said nothing about having been married. Who in thunder told you all that rot, anyway?"

The tone of the last sentence was very different. It might have brought a smile to Percy's stiff lips if the circumstances had been different, but as it was he saw nothing amusing in it.

"Olga," he replied, shortly.

"I might have known it!" cried Jack, his eyes flashing. "That girl is nothing short of a devil. But for an accident she would have accomplished her infernal designs, and once your wife—well hang it! she is beyond my comprehension. I don't know what she did promise herself!"

"For the love of Heaven, Jack, don't speak in enigmas!" exclaimed Percy, breathlessly. "Tell me what you mean! Is not Eva married? And why did she leave your house? Was it not to avoid me?"

"Yes, perhaps. In fact, I think that was the very reason; but it was compulsion used by that creature you were insulting enough to call my sister. Confound it, Percy! I should have told you long ago if you hadn't said that. I see she has been impounding upon you with no end of lies. She turned Eva out of our house in the night, and none of us—that is neither my father nor I—knew anything about it until we discovered

her quite by accident in the street yesterday morning fainting from hunger."

"Good heavens! I passed her in the street yesterday morning myself. I did not speak to her because Olga had told me it was her desire that I should not."

"Talk about the 'Queen of Liars,'" ejaculated Jack, with disgust. "I haven't got time to unfold the whole truth now, but I know where Eva is, and I am ready to take you to her if you want to go. Do you? Are you quite sure that you will make her your wife, knowing that this story of her mother's life will be told in all its odious details to the whole world? Are you quite sure, Percy?"

He was leaning forward earnestly, looking with strained eagerness into the handsome face of his friend. A wild excitement burned in Percy's dark eyes. He could scarcely control himself.

"What is all the world to me compared with her love!" he exclaimed, fervently. "What do I care so that I may shield and protect her? Was she to blame? Is it not my right, my duty, to save her from my father's crime? It is not her mother I blame, but my father—my father; and it is she who must forgive. Jack, put yourself in my place, and ask what you would do. Should it be love or honour, which?"

Jack leaned back and raised his hand to his brow pathetically; but there was no hesitation in his manner.

"Look here, Percy," he said, slowly, "we'll waive that question for a time, because I've got something to tell you—something which I believe is right that you should know. It is for Eva's sake that I tell you, though it will injure your father in your estimation. Loving my father as I do, that would kill me. He has been my everything in my life—mother, friend, even life itself. But with you it is different. You have the whole world, health, stalwart strength, and besides that—a censure of your father has already grown up in your heart. I hate to tell you anything that will further hurt him; but it is but just to others that you should know. I have discovered a secret connected with his life, Percy—one which he should have told you long ago, but perhaps had not the courage to do so. There is one thing that I have learned with great force of late, and that is that we have not the right to judge of another's temptation."

"Don't try to spare me Jack. Only tell me."

"Your father is married."

"To—"

"Madame Honora—yes."

"Thank Heaven he has righted that wrong at last!"

"No, he has not, Percy. I should have come to you with delight in my heart and have told you as glad tidings had that been true. It is not. He has righted no wrong. The wrong still stands, more glaring, more hideous than on the day that it was committed, blighting young lives as well as old, tearing young hearts. This marriage took place ten years ago, and has not been acknowledged yet; but his victim could bear the strain no longer. Her duty to her child demanded that she should break faith with the man who had deceived and betrayed her. She told me half an hour ago. She has gone to tell Eva now. Eva is the daughter of an honourable woman, Percy—more honourable that you or I could ever dream of being, more honourable than the world could ever understand. She has stood by her word, though it has broken her heart. Eva is the daughter of your step-mother, but that places no barrier between you. Shall you still make her your wife?"

"Before all the world, if she will let me. Somehow I am not surprised at what you have told me. I read truth in Honora Master's face the night I met her in the country. But what shall I say of my father, the man who has acted so cowardly a part, the man who has betrayed the woman who trusted him, the liar, the—"

"Don't, Percy! You will live to regret it! Has not this been a lesson to us all? If he has sinned, Heaven will know how to punish; then let Heaven have its way."

"You ask more than is human. You—" "No. You will have your wife. What more do you desire?"

For a moment Percy hesitated, then he went toward Jack and put out his hand.

"And you?" he asked, as the other hand fell upon the boy's shoulder.

"I am not sure that I shall not be the happiest of all," he replied, brokenly. "I have the blessed consciousness of having done my duty well. I have an engagement to lunch with Eva and your step-mother at two. There is just time to make it comfortable. Will you come?"

The question did not require an answer: but ten minutes later Tofts rolled the chair down the steps, and the two friends went away together.

CHAPTER XXXV.

OBEYING to his instructions, it was two very smiling faces that Jack saw when he had knocked for and had been granted permission to enter Eva's room.

He had rolled in first, and a moment later Percy followed, divested of his hat and walking-stick.

There was no suggestion of hysteria about the two women when they saw him. He went straight up to his father's wife and kissed her upon the mouth.

"I want to congratulate myself upon the possession of my sweet mother," he said, gently, "and I know of no way so good as to assert my rights at once. My only regret is that I have been cheated out of them for ten long years. It is a loss which cannot easily be estimated. Doubly my mother, are you not?"

He threw a tender glance in Eva's direction, and crossed to her at once.

"You have been very cruel," he said, softly. "You ought to say to you!"

But she was looking dumbly from him to Jack and back again, continuing the old suffering from which she had known no relief for months. Jack came to her rescue at once, loving her far too well to prolong her misery for even one moment.

"It is no use, Eva," he said, laughing to conceal his pain. "I couldn't play the highwayman. My selfishness was too great. I have brought your lover back to you, without a single barrier left—love without dishonor, dear, and I shall expect you to thank me as I deserve."

There were tears in her eyes now. She took her hands from Percy and extended them to really the better of the two men, and no disloyalty was shown to Percy in the acknowledgment.

"I never can thank you as you deserve," she said, brokenly. "Not if I were to try until the day I died and a thousand years were awarded me. I should never have believed such generosity as yours could exist. I owe not alone my mother to you, but—"

She paused, her eyes travelling eloquently to Percy. Percy leaned forward and passed his hand caressingly over the bright hair.

He was too generous to kiss her in Jack's presence, for he knew but too painfully well what the boy had given up for him.

But Jack laughed again, even more carelessly than before.

"I shall be eaten up with vanity when all this is over," he said, lightly. "By the way, Eva, has my father been here?"

"Yes. I asked him to join us at luncheon, not knowing we were to have other guests. What a happy luncheon it will be for me! Oh, I—I—I never can tell you all how happy I am!"

And then, true to all womanly traditions, she broke down, and fell to weeping as if her heart would break.

Her mother and Percy were beside her in a moment, Jack alone remaining away. Perhaps he had never felt his helplessness so much as at that moment, but even then his sweet nature came to the surface.

"Let her alone," he cried, cheerfully. "It is the best thing she could possibly do. It's!"

only an April shower. The sun is not even concealed."

She smiled at him even while he spoke.

"He is right; don't mind me!" she cried, happily. "I am so full of joy that I think my very heart would burst if it could not find relief. And just when I had abandoned all hope of everything, too. Oh Jack, do let me kiss you! Please, please do!"

She got up and went to him, regardless of the fact that her *nightgown* was size too large for her, and looked curiously grotesque. She knelt beside his chair, and like a hero he submitted to her cares.

"I must make the most of it," he said, glancing ruefully at Percy, and covering his pain with a jest. "I suppose it is the last you are likely to permit me."

"Since I owe all I have or am ever likely to have to you, you accuse me of great lack of gratitude," answered Percy, earnestly.

"But where is Kate?" cried Eva, realizing that they were upon ground that had better be avoided for this day at least. "Dear Kate! My happiness could never be complete without the dear friend who stood by me and suffered and starved with me in the hour of my greatest need. But for her I should not be here now, the happiest girl in the whole world. Let me find Kate!"

She opened the door to the next room, and found her there. She called her in and presented her.

Kate smiled with winsome sweeteness upon them all, but when she was presented to Percy, light seemed to break in upon her.

"Miss Master's fiancée and her mother's stepson," explained Jack, in an aside.

"That explains the cause of the fainting attack yesterday," announced Kate, nodding her head in an amused fashion at Eva.

"What?" questioned Percy.

"You passed us in the street. A moment later there was a burden deposited in my arms too heavy for me to bear—and-well, I let it fall. The result—I rather fancy that all this is the result. Another instance of the truth that it is an ill wind that blows no good."

Percy's hand had stolen quietly to Eva's, and had pressed it beneath the voluminous folds of the *nightgown*. His handsome eyes caressed her.

Ralph Austruther came in a few minutes later, and matters were explained to him.

He glanced swiftly toward Jack, but one look into that warning eye was enough for the father. He bore his pain as silently as his son had done, marvelling at the courage of that burdened spirit to bear so heroically.

"My boy—" he began, as they left the house together; but Jack lifted his hand wistfully to command silence.

"Not now, father," he said, gently; "not till I give you leave. I can bear it so much better in silence. Afterward, when I am better, I am going to ask you to take me away for awhile; just you and Tofts and I together. It won't be much fun travelling with a cripple, but you won't mind that. You never did mind anything you did for me. Ah, dad! I no fellow ever had such a father as you, and I can stand the loss of everything else so long as I have you. But now, tell me: What are we going to do with these two immaculate women of our household?"

He looked up with a comical smile, and Ralph Austruther heaved a great sigh of relief. His son's heart was not quite broken so long as he could even utter so feeble a joke as that. His own face lightened perceptibly, in spite of the seriousness of the matter he had to consider.

"I don't know. What would you suggest?" he asked.

"Well, I was just dying to see Olga's face when we tell her that Percy and Eva are to be married off-hand, without any preparations for the wedding whatever, and that Eva's mother has been Gerald Ralton's wife for more than ten years."

"Speaking of that, what are they going to do about that very honourable gentleman?"

"I don't know," answered Jack, ruefully. "He is the single cloud upon the horizon. He is because your own plans have miscarried, you

has gone out of town to-day, and will not be back until night. Then Percy is going to see him. It will be reversing the order of things with a vengeance, will it not? The son taking the father to task for a sin committed!"

"If he has any conscience left it will bleed," said Ralph Austruther, softly. "I am glad it is he, and not I."

They found Olga just emerging from the drawing-room, not looking the picture of contentment by any means; and for the first time in his life Jack seemed possessed of a spirit of annoyance.

"Oh, by the way, Olga," he said, lightly. "I have to apologize to you for causing a young man to break an appointment with you to-day. I suppose I shall never be forgiven. In justice to him, when I overtook him. I hope I didn't spoil any very great pleasure: but if I have, comfort yourself with the charitable reflection that it was for his happiness."

She stood there looking at him like a thunder-cloud; but the smile only deepened on Jack's countenance.

"You are pleased to be enigmatical," she said, sarcastically.

"And you lack the patience to read enigmas, eh? All right. You shall have it straight. Percy told me about that ridiculous rubbish you told him yesterday—you know, about Eva's marriage. I told him how absurd it all was, and he went there with me to luncheon, instead of keeping his appointment with you, and—"

Jack was hurrying on at a bewildering rate, striving to tell it all in a single breath; but Olga cut him short.

Like a cyclone she tore at him, uttering such fierce denunciations as would look badly in print, and not edifying even those most interested, until Ralph Austruther took her forcibly by the arm.

It must be confessed with chagrin that Jack was rather enjoying the impotent fury.

"How dare you!" cried her step-father, white with wrath. "You have not hesitated to lie, to traduce a pure and good girl, to impose yourself upon a young man who had no desire whatever to make you his wife, but you have absolutely threatened that if your infamous designs were interfered with you would air your grievances in the courts. Be perfectly assured that no one cares in the least what you do. A creature such as you is not worthy of any consideration whatever; but remember that as long as you remain beneath my roof you must behave yourself as nearly like a lady as you can assume the manner that does not, by either birth or breeding, belong to you. You have hesitated at no low device by which your infernal designs could be furthered; but you can carry them no further. You must speak to my son as master of this house after me, and any repetition of such language as you have been guilty of to-day will be punished as it deserves."

White with fury, gasping for breath, yet absolutely unable to speak, Olga stood there for a minute, then turned and fled up the stairs, straight to her mother's room.

She flung open the door, and stood there looking at her mother, who had turned to her in surprise as she entered, then burst out—

"I have been insulted! And by those two men who lived upon your bounty. It was my father's money that saved them both from the gutter, and I will not stand it! Do you hear? You shall avenge this insult! You shall leave that man, and never, so long as you live, shall you set foot beneath his roof. But I will teach him a lesson which he will long remember. I will take this matter to the courts. He has robbed me of everything, and now—"

But her mother's tears put a stop to her flow of wrath.

"Will you never let me have peace!" the fat woman exclaimed, dimly. "What is that you want? To disgrace us all! You were the one that made all the trouble about the nursery governess. I told you that no good would ever come of it. You made me jealous, and now, because your own plans have miscarried, you

want to put all the punishment upon me. I won't have—"

But there the door slammed, and neither Jack nor his father heard how the altercation ended.

Ralph Austruther heaved a deep sigh. Perhaps down in his heart there had been an unacknowledged hope that the matter might be taken to the divorce court, and so rid him of the greatest mistake of his life, but—

He smiled slightly, and helped Toffs to take the invalid upstairs.

(To be continued.)

LOVE THE CONQUERER.

(Continued from page 200.)

"Miss Villiers, may I take silence for consent?"

Sue started, abruptly recalled to the present. Another voice had been in her ears—one whose tones had power to stir her as no other man's ever had. She looked up, and at the satisfied expression of security on Lord Delamere's face her pride took alarm, and her lips refused to frame the words that would secure her so much that she valued.

"Lord Delamere," she said, in slow, measured tones, "the reason for which I before refused you is one that I must still put forward. I do not think a union between us likely to secure the happiness of either."

He gave a slight supercilious smile. "She does not like to yield too readily," he thought.

"If I am willing to overlook all objections, Miss Villiers, surely you may be so also."

The slight emphasis on the latter pronoun still further irritated her haughty spirit, and her repugnance to him was roused in full force as she saw how confident he was that his suit would now be successful.

"You are willing to take a wife who has no affection for you?" she said.

"When a man is in love, Miss Villiers, he is lenient in many ways in which he would not otherwise be."

She looked at him haughtily.

"I do not understand you, Lord Delamere. What question of leniency is there between us?"

"I was merely speaking in a general way, I assure you," he returned. "I can only repeat I am willing to take the consequences of a union between us."

"Your generosity is too great," she said, with chill irony—Lord Delamere did not seem to perceive it, he bowed in gracious acknowledgment—"so great that I could not think of abusing it," she continued. "I must, therefore, beg to decline your flattering proposals."

He drew himself up stiffly.

"This is no matter for trifling, Miss Villiers."

"Decidedly not. I fully mean what I say."

The surprise, disgust and indignation on his face were curious to behold.

"Miss Villiers," he said, when he could at length find voice to speak, "you can hardly be aware of what you are rejecting."

"I am fully aware of the condescension you imagine you are doing me," returned Isabel. "Unfortunately, I am not able to appreciate it."

"Few men would have acted as I have done," said the Earl, his outraged feelings getting the better of his good breeding, "and I think you will discover that you have thrown away what may not again be within your reach."

She drew herself up with proud dignity. "You are forgetting yourself, Lord Delamere. You will allow me to intimate to you that I desire our interview to end."

"Certainly," he returned, his face flushed with anger. "I doubt but that you will yet regret your decision."

"Scarcely, when I think of the alternative," was the crushing reply.

She stood for a few minutes motionless after

he had left her, her hands clasped, her head drooped, her whole attitude denoting despair.

"He is right, he is right," she murmured; "I shall yet regret it; but how link oneself to such a man as that! Ah, me! that I should stand so alone now—that I should not have done better with my life than this."

The day of her departure was now rapidly approaching. She had resolved to accompany Mrs. Singleton, who had taken a small house in the country. Far away from the scenes of her former triumphs did Isabel wish to hide herself there, "by the world forgot," could she in solitude mourn over her vanished past, her shattered future.

Eva Chichester had, indeed, begged her to go and stay with her till her marriage; but Isabel had at once refused. She would not now have the means to go into society, and she could not have endured to do so in her changed position.

She was aware how different it would be, for her wealth had been as great a power almost as her beauty, and, as she proudly told herself, where she had ruled she would never serve.

"How I shall miss you, dear Isabel!" said Eva, as she bade her friend good-bye, her eyes filling with tears.

"At first you may, but you will soon have other things to occupy your thoughts," answered Isabel, with quivering lips.

Eva threw her arms round her. "Dear, forgive me; but could not you, too, have been happy in that way?" she said, softly.

Isabel struggled to preserve her calmness; but her breath came in quick gasps, and she turned away her head to hide her emotion.

It was not easy, however, to withstand Eva's tender sympathy, and gradually she was won over to confide in her.

Of Isabel's refusal of Lysaght Eva had heard from Charteris, who was very indignant at Miss Villiers' treatment of his friend, declaring that she would yet regret it, but it would be too late, as Lysaght would never ask her again.

Eva's task of consolation was therefore rather a difficult one, as she dared not raise hopes that might never be realised.

"How could you suffer yourself to be influenced by any words of Lady Luxmore?" she asked. "Arthur says Capt. Lysaght would have spoken to you long ago, but he feared you might misconstrue his motives. And do you know, dear," she proceeded, hesitatingly, "Arthur had gathered something about your father's difficulties, and it was only when he told Captain Lysaght that he had found courage to ask you to be his wife."

Every one of these words was a dagger thrust. She had scorned and mistrusted him when he was acting from such pure, noble motives.

"What have I not thrown away?" The words were wrung from her aching heart. She felt, indeed, justly punished; now when she would have had a strong arm to protect her, a true love to comfort her, she had to stand alone to battle for herself.

A few days later she left Lowndes-squares—left for ever the home that had sheltered her happy childhood, her brilliant girlhood, where she had woven bright plans, formed high hopes. Others would fill those rooms where she had reigned in her queenly beauty; into other hands would pass those luxuries which had been such fitting surroundings for her.

CHAPTER VIII.

FOUR months have gone by when we again take up the thread of our story—months which have failed to bring any peace to Isabel's restless, aching heart, and which had so changed her that one could scarcely have recognized the once brilliant and fascinating beauty. Her cheek had lost its colour, her eyes their brightness and animation, a listlessness and torpor seemed to weigh her down.

Yet she had tried hard to forget, to bury for ever the past, with its dead hopes, to turn her life to some good account. The thought of the happiness she had thrown away was ever present

to her, to mock her with the contrast to her now dreary lot. It has been truly said:—

It is not at our choice that we forget;
That is a power no science teaches yet;
The heart may be a dark and closed up tomb,
But memory stands a ghost amidst the gloom.

There were times when she even felt as though she would have done well to have accepted Lord Delamere, for that nothing could be worse than her present aimless existence.

Yet she never complained of the many privations her altered circumstances entailed; whatever her feelings she gave no utterance to them.

She was still with Mrs. Singleton in the little, quiet West of England village. Whenever she broached the subject of leaving her and seeking some employment her friend silenced her.

"My dear," she would say, "you are not fit for it. Stay with me yet awhile, brighter days may be coming."

Brighter days! Isabel told herself that for her they were gone for ever.

"Isabel, my dear!" said Mrs. Singleton, one afternoon early in March, "you really ought to go out for awhile; it is not good to stay so much in the house—I have to change my book at the library. Will you not come also?"

Isabel acquiesced, though against her inclination; but she was more ready now than of yore to yield her will for others; and the slight imperiousness that formerly characterised her manner had given place to a gentleness infinitely more attractive.

On their return to the house in about an hour's time they were informed by the servant that a gentleman was waiting to see them.

"Who can it be?" said Mrs. Singleton, for their visitors were few.

"Perhaps Captain Charteris," returned Isabel, as they went up to the drawing-room. "Eva said, in her last letter, she should send him soon to look us up."

As they opened the door a tall figure turned from the mantelpiece, and advanced to meet them.

"Captain Lysaght!" exclaimed Mrs. Singleton; "this is, indeed, a pleasure."

The room seemed to swim round Isabel; involuntarily she grasped the back of a chair to steady herself. She never knew how she got through the ceremony of handshaking; she felt like one in a dream.

"You are surprised no doubt, to see me," he said, in those grave, rich tones that were such music in her ears; "but I am on my way to Wales to see some friends, and as I shall soon be starting for India I thought I would come and wish you good-bye, as I knew I should not have another opportunity."

"What are you returning so soon?" said Mrs. Singleton; "shall you not be sorry to leave England?"

"I think not," was his answer, but it was given as though putting a force on himself.

Isabel felt as though she could bear it no longer. What had he come for? Merely to show her he had conquered his love! She, too, then must struggle to speak quietly.

"Have you seen Eva lately?" she inquired, with an effort.

"I saw her yesterday. I mentioned I should most likely take L—on my way, and she asked me to deliver this letter," he replied, as he handed Isabel one.

After that one question she was silent again, feeling that she dared not trust her voice. Mrs. Singleton, however, kept up the conversation, and so nearly an hour slipped by. It was then about six o'clock, and Mrs. Singleton begged him to stay and dine with them; they were going to sit down in a few minutes.

"That is, if you are going to remain in L—tonight, and can dine at such an unfashionable hour," she said. "We shall, I assure you, be quite grateful to you for enlivening our solitude."

Mrs. Singleton was unaware of what had passed between Isabel and Lysaght, and thought the girl's silence and agitation due to the fact that his presence brought back to her more keenly the past, and all its gay scenes. Lysaght hesitated,

for a moment ere replying to Mrs. Singleton. Isabel wondered if it were her fancy that his eyes wandered to her, but did not speak; and she hardly knew whether she were glad or sorry when he accepted the invitation. It was joy again to be with him, to hear his voice, yet it was torture so feel he had become indifferent to her.

In a few moments Mrs. Singleton made some excuse and left the room, intent on some household care; and, to Isabel's consternation, she found herself alone with him—the thing of all others she wished to avoid. It was he who first broke the silence.

"Have you decided to settle here, Miss Villiers?"

"Yes," she replied, "at least for a time."

"It is a pretty place, but I should have thought it too quiet to suit you."

"I can no longer consult my own inclinations, though they would not lead me to seek any quietness" she answered, sadly; then, as though fearing she had said too much, she continued, quickly: "Do you meditate making a long stay in Wales, Captain Lynaugh?"

"Only a few days."

Another pause, which Isabel felt to be unbearable. She clasped and unclasped her hands in nervous agitation.

"Have you been ill?" he asked, in gentler tones than he had yet spoken, his dark eyes dwelling earnestly on her pale face. "You are not looking like yourself."

"I have gone through a great deal," she said, simply, in a sad, pathetic tone that thrilled his heart.

His face changed, a softened look stole over it. He rose and came nearer to her, and spoke low and earnestly. "I would have shielded you from all if you had but let me."

There was no answer, but he saw the tightened clasp of her trembling hands, her quick, agitated breathing.

"Isabel," he went on, "I have since learnt that you refused me because you did not believe in my love for you—because you thought it was your fortune I sought. I had hoped you would have known me better."

He paused a moment, then continued with more agitation.—

"I have resolved that I would never seek you again, but the thought of you, alone and in trouble, has been more than I could bear. Isabel, now that that fortune no longer stands between us, now that you can no longer misjudge me, tell me, must I leave England alone?"

He possessed himself of her cold hands, and bent over her. The next moment her head had sunk on his shoulder, and she was murmuring, amidst her tears,—

"Can you ever forgive me?"

His answer was to put his arm round her and call her by every endearing name.

When she had regained her composure there were mutual confidences to be exchanged. Isabel could not understand that he should ever have wished to see her again.

She then learnt that Eva had told Charteris everything, and begged him to use his influence in persuading his friend to go to L——, a not very difficult task, for Lynaugh's inclinations were urging him to that course himself.

She then told him how wretched she had been, how she had always loved him, and her bitter remorse for her hasty, scornful rejection of him.

"And now I am so happy," she said, looking up at him with glistening eyes; "so much happier than I deserve."

"My darling!" he murmured, as he bent over her with a look of unutterable tenderness in his dark eyes. "My darling, I have won you at last!"

When Mrs. Singleton returned to the drawing-room she stood for a few moments in silent amazement at the turn affairs had taken, but when she had been duly enlightened on all points her congratulations were most hearty and affectionate.

She would scarcely have recognised Isabel for the pale, unhappy girl of half-an-hour ago, and she thought she had never seen her look lovelier

than with the light of her love shining in her beautiful eyes, and lending additional sweetness to her smile.

They spent a very happy evening together, talking over the future, and making their plans. It wanted now but six weeks to the expiration of Captain Lynaugh's leave, of which he had been unable to gain an extension; therefore the immediate question to be decided was whether their marriage should take place at once, or whether they should wait till his return in a year's time with his regiment.

Isabel soon settled the point, for her heart sank at the idea of a separation from him, and to his great joy, declared her readiness to accompany him.

The wedding, therefore, was fixed for the end of the month, when they would at once sail for India.

Eve wrote a long, sympathising letter as soon as she heard the news, begging her friend to go and stay with her, and be married from her father's house the same day as herself. Isabel, however, could not accede to this kind proposal, as she wished her wedding to be a very simple affair, and she preferred being married at the quiet little country village, where, she said, the greatest happiness of her life had come to her.

It was on a lovely evening in early spring that Claude Lynaugh and his beautiful bride sailed for India.

They stood together on deck, and through the gathering shades of twilight watched the shore slowly fade from view.

"Good-bye, dear old England," murmured Isabel, softly, with a momentary *cerrement de cœur*. "I wonder when I shall see your shores again."

"My darling, tell me you have nothing to regret," said her husband, tenderly, as he put his arm round her.

She raised her lovely eyes and looked at him through a mist of happy tears.

"Regret. Oh, Claude, if you knew how tired I often was of everything, what a restless, unsatisfied longing my heart held even when surrounded by every luxury and enjoyment, you would not ask that question."

He stooped and kissed her.

"May you know nothing but happiness, love," he said, "in your new home."

"I must know happiness when I have you," she said, softly, as their lips met in one long, lingering kiss.

Slowly the shadows fall, gently does night wrap them in her embrace; the stars gleam out one by one, the moon sheds her silvery radiance on the tranquil waters below.

The calm beauty of the night seemed in harmony with the sense of rest and peace that stole over Isabel as she stood there with her husband's arm around her, and his words of love in her ears—the love that, Heaven willing, was to shelter and shield her through the coming years.

[THE END.]

A FAVOURITE sport of a Polish gentleman is to capture a wolf alive. A wolf being driven into the open, the well-mounted horseman pursues it, armed only with a long whip and some rope. The wolf after a time tries to take rest, but the rider forces it on with his whip, till, after repeated attempts at rest, it sinks exhausted. The rider then springs from his horse, jumps astride the wolf, and holding it by the ears secures it with the rope. Most men require the assistance of a mounted companion, who ties the wolf while the other holds its ears with both hands, and in this way the capture is comparatively easy, but to do it single-handed is a difficult feat. Nasty bites and even dangerous wounds result, should the hunter have miscalculated the strength of the animal. No one, however, is considered a perfect sportsman till he has done this, yet many never succeed.

EPPS'S COCOAINE COCOA-NIB EXTRACT.

(Tea-like).

The choicest roasted nibs (broken-up beans) of the natural Cocoa on being subjected to powerful hydraulic pressure, give forth their excess of oil, leaving for use a finely flavoured powder—“Cocoaine,” a product which, when prepared with boiling water, has the consistence of tea, of which it is now, with many, beneficially taking the place. Its active principle being a gentle nerve stimulant, supplies the needed energy without unduly exciting the system. Sold only in Tins, by Grocers, labelled:

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DEAFNESS.

DEAFNESS AND ITS CURE.—All sufferers are invited to send to R. KEMPF, 56, Bedford Row, Holborn, London, who will forward, post free, particulars of new simple home-treatment. The most obstinate cases permanently cured. No artificial ear-drums required.

OTTEY'S UNLABELLED STRONG PILLS

Are twice as efficacious as any others, and always quickly and certainly relieve. Greatly superior to Steel and Fumyroyal. Invaluable to women. Post free for 14 and 35 stamps from **THOMAS OTTEY, Chemist, Burton-on-Trent.** Please mention paper.



STOUT PERSONS

Should try Dr. Vincent's Anti-Stout Pill. They will quickly and easily reduce superfluous flesh, in some cases as much as 10 lbs. in a week. They are guaranteed perfectly harmless and pleasant to take. 3s., 6s., and 10/- a box post free from Dr. VINCENT, 47, Park Hastings, Hornsey, London. Mention this paper.

FACETIE.

WHY is Canada like courtship?—Because it borders on the United States.

PHOTOGRAPHER: "Photograph, sir?" Customer: "Yes, sir." Photographer: "Inside or outside, sir?"

MAX: "Is Miss Strongmind an advanced woman?" Pamela: "Yes; she is always to the front in all the clearance sale rushies."

SIM (after the proposal): "You must give me time." He: "To consider?" She: "No; to break off my last engagement."

PICKPOCKET out of work: "I'll tell you what it is, winter is the worst time of year for us; everybody has his hands in his pockets."

MRS. NEEDLE: "That young doctor makes an immense number of calls on Mrs. Ogleby. Is she very sick?" Mr. Needle: "No; but she is very pretty."

HORRIFIED MOTHER: "I should like to know how you happened to let young Simpkins kiss you?" Daughter: "I—I thought no one was looking."

WARRINGTON: "It's awfully extravagant of you to go to such an expensive tailor." Dennis: "What could I do? He was the only one who would trust me."

MISTRESS: "I can't say that you were always respectful, Bridget; still I will put it in the recommendation." Bridget: "Thank you, ma'am! An' I'll say the same thing uv you."

MRS. CHINWORK: "Seems to me your husband is becoming very absent-minded." Mrs. Next-door: "Indeed he is. Why, last night he forgot to go to the club."

DOCTOR PILLS: "Who was the most successful of all the girls who were studying medicine with you?" Doctor Squills: "Miss Ketchem; she got married."

MRS. CHINWORK: "Miss Elder is trying to make a new woman of herself." Mrs. Chatterton: "Is she?" Mrs. Chinwork: "Yes; she has already knocked fifteen years off her age."

"YOUR practice will kill you," said the doctor to the young woman suffering from too much piano-playing. "That's all right," she responded spitefully; "yours kills other people."

HUSBAND: "Yes, dear, you look nice in that dress; but it cost me a heap of money." Wife: "Freddie, dear, what do I care for money when it is a question of pleasing you!"

"WHAT do you think? Young Daubyrr is going to marry that rich old Moneymore girl. And he used to talk so much about being for ever wedded to art." "Well, she's mostly art."

It is said that "out of every one hundred and nine female school teachers seven marry every year." How awful it must be for those seven women to marry every year!

"JOHN, what is the past to see?"—"Seen, sir?"—"No, John, it is raw."—"Yes, sir; so if a sea fish swims by me it becomes a sea-fish when it is past and can't be seen."

CALING sent a friend of his a number of small and light articles in a letter. He added by way of postscript: "Be very careful how you open the envelope!"

"LOOK here! Did you say I was a liar?" demanded the angry man. "Calm yourself, sir. What I said was that you had mistaken your vocation. You ought to have been a diplomatist."

A FAMOUS Prussian general was inspecting some military stables. "What do I see there," he said, in tones of thunder, to a sergeant. "Cobwebs!" "Yes, sir," was the respectful reply. "We keep them there to catch the flies, and prevent them teasing the horses."

A YOUNG lady, the other day, in the course of a lecture, said: "Get married, young man, and be quick about it, too. Don't wait for the millennium, hoping that girls will turn angels before you trust to one of them. A pretty thing you would be alongside of an angel wouldn't you, you brute?"

REGINALD: "Do you know, guv'nor, I'm thinking of getting a bicycle. What do you think of the idea?" Guv'nor (with a growl): "Oh, do it by all means, Reginald. The bicycle, they say, is an excellent thing for the development of calves."

ALICE: "What are you looking up in the obituary column so eagerly?" BOSS: "Dick proposed to me over a week ago, and I told him to ask pa." Alice: "And did he?" BOSS: "That's what I'm trying to find out, as he hasn't turned up since."

ANGRY WIFE (after a quarrel): "Seems to me we've been married about a hundred years. I can't even remember when or where we first met." Husband (emphatically): "I can. It was at a dinner-party, and there were thirteen at table."

THE teacher was asking questions—teachers are quite apt to ask questions, and they sometimes receive curious answers. This question was as follows: "Now, pupils, how many months have twenty-eight days?" "All of them, teacher," replied the boy on the front seat.

"Yes," said the milkman, "we do have a great deal of milk on our hands sometimes; but this week we've taken a contract to whitewash a couple of barns, so I think we shall manage to use up all our surplus stock. How many pints did you say?" And he stirred up another can.

YOUNG WIFE: "Dear, why are you eating so much more of my cake than usual to-night? Is it nicer than it was last night?" Young Husband: "I—my darling—I—well, to tell you the truth, I bet Toozie five dollars that I weigh more than he, and we are going down to the store to settle it to-night."

"WHAT nonsense!" exclaimed Bertha. "The idea of telling Mrs. Brown that you were only twenty-three!" "But didn't I do right, dear?" replied Edith. "You know that mamma has always taught us not to exaggerate. It is better to under, rather than overstate, you know."

"HARRIS's bill from my wife's dressmaker. I hate to pay dressmaking bills, don't you, Larkin?" "No; I'm very fond of my wife's dressmaker. It's a positive pleasure to pay her bills." "Good heavens, Larkin! You must be crazy, man! Who is your wife's dressmaker?" "My wife."

JINKS: "You don't look well, Winks." Winks: "No; that new cook of ours is giving me dyspepsia." "Send her away." "She's neat about the house and very respectful, and my wife won't part with her." "Well, Winks, you'll be sick if she isn't got rid of. Make love to her." "Cracky! Never thought of that."

"DON'T you long for the springtime," said the poetic youth, "when two young hearts can wander over the woodlands picking flowers?" "Yes," replied the ordinary person, "I do. It would be a lot better than wandering around among the florists, trying to see where you can get the biggest bouquet for two shillings."

MERCHANT: "You think your son would make us a satisfactory errand boy, do you?" Mrs. Moriarty: "Whatever's do, sir, o' do it very quick." Merchant (turning to the boy): "James, take this note up to Captain Centrefield at the ball grounds and back in twenty minutes." "Never mind, Jimmy! Coom ah home. It's not a bye they're wantin'; it's an angel."

"I HAVE seen the bright side of the East," says a recent traveller; "it was fit, therefore, that I should see its dark side. The night was chilly, and I sought shelter in a native cottage. I will not describe the night—but next morning! Reader, did you ever see, in this age of illustrated garments, a shirt printed all over with little dots? *So have I!*"

"I SAY," said the regular customer, as he stopped at the restaurant cashier's box to pay for the dinner he had had, "where did you get that beef you are serving to-day?" "What's the matter with it?" aggressively asked the cashier, who scented another row. "Oh, there's nothing the matter with it! That's why I asked."

On a small building job in the vicinity of Bristol there were three labourers employed, one of whom, thinking to ingratiate himself with his employer, went up to him one day and, touching his cap said: "Excuse me, sir, but I think two of us labourers could do all there is to be done on this job." "Oh, you do!" returned the "boss." "Do you feel confident?" "Quite, sir!" replied the man. "Very well," said his employer, "I shall not want you after Saturday."

"Yes," said a noted detective, "I have seen a great many queer things in my experience. But, between you and me, the most complete piece of deception I ever saw was a woman—young, pretty, and I would have sworn she was an angel." "But she wasn't!" "I should say not. She has a temper like a whirlwind, and when she gets mad the very earth seems to shake." "Good gracious! And how did you manage to get down to her true character?" "Well, I—ahem—the fact is, I married her."

A YOUNG woman answered an advertisement for a servant, and the lady of the house seemed pleased with her. But before engaging her there were some questions to ask. "Suppose," said the lady—"now only suppose, understand—that you were carrying a piece of steak from the kitchen, and by accident should let it slip from the plate to the floor, what should you do?" The girl looked the lady straight in the eye for a moment before asking: "Is it a private family, m'm, or are there boarders?" "Boarders," answered the lady. "Pick it up and put it back on the plate," firmly replied the girl. She was engaged.

A GOOD story is told of a jobbing gardener rejoicing in the name of William Shakespeare, who plies his trade in a London suburb. A gentleman who engages his services for two days in every week of the year was so well pleased with the work done by him that he presented him recently with a sovereign over and above his usual pay. "With my best wishes, William," he said. "By the way, William, what is your other name?" "Shakespeare, sir—William Shakespeare." "Yes; I believe I have heard that name before," said the gentleman. "I suppose you have, sir, I suppose you have," said the gardener. "I've been workin' in these parts for twenty years off and on, sir."

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**The ONLY MEANS for
DESTROYING HAIR ON THE FACE**

is by using ALIX BOSS's ordinary "Regulators," 3s. 6d.; post, 2s. 6d. For strong hair, the Electric Appliance, 3s. For this hair, the German "Froehlich," and "Caterpillar," 3s. 6d.; post, 2s. 6d. The Caterpillar is popular with horses or hair on the head. His Skin Tightener, a liquid for removing furrows and crow's feet marks under the eyes, are each sold at 3s. 6d.; by post, 2s. 6d. The Nose Machine, for pressing the cartilage of the nose into shape, and the Ear Machine, for condensing ears, are sold at 1s. 6d., or sent for, 1s. 6d. Address, 68, Newgate Street, High Holborn, London. Had a rough all Chemist. Letters replied to in stamped envelope; parcels sent free from observation.

DOES YOUR HEAD ACHE?

"KAPUTINE" cures instantly.

Enclose stamped addressed envelope to "K., KAPUTINE, LTD., HUDDERSFIELD, for free samples, with name of nearest agent.

All communications respecting Advertisements should be addressed to the

"LONDON READER" OFFICE,
326, Strand, London, W.C.

SOCIETY.

The Queen has promised to be present at the great garden party to be given by the Prince and Princess of Wales at Marlborough House in the early part of July.

This month Queen Victoria entered upon the sixtieth year of her reign—a term which has only been attained by one previous English sovereign, her Majesty's grandfather, King George III. With the approach of next year's Accession Day, which will mark the completion of the sixty years of the Queen's reign, it is hoped that steps will be taken to observe the event by public rejoicing on a scale hardly if at all inferior to that of the memorable Jubilee celebrations of 1887.

The King of Denmark is now in excellent health, and takes a long ride regularly every afternoon. Queen Louise is also very well, except that she has to be carried up and down stairs. The Queen has found much difficulty during the last two years in either walking up or coming down any staircase, and lifts for her accommodation have been fitted in the Royal Palace of Copenhagen and in Bernstorff Castle.

The Empress of Russia wore the national diadem at the Coronation called Kokoshnik, which is set with pearls, and tied behind with white faille ribbon in long ends. A lace veil, worn in the Russian style behind the bandeau, is thrown back, and falls half-way down the mantle. With this she also wore a magnificent necklace composed of several rows of the most exquisite pearls.

KING CHRISTIAN has left Copenhagen on his annual visit to Wiesbaden, where he is to stay for a month at the Park Hotel, and while there he will pay visits to the Empress Frederick at Cronberg, the Landgrave of Hesse at Philippsruhe, and the Prince and Princess Frederick Charles of Hesse at Rumpenheim. The King will go from Wiesbaden to Giessen to spend a fortnight with the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland, after which he is coming to England for the Royal wedding.

PRINCESS HELEN, the little baby whose birth has occasioned such joy to the Crown Prince and Princess of Greece, as she is the first girl who has been born to them, is the twenty-fifth grandchild of the Queen, and her tenth great granddaughter. In each new baby the Sovereign takes an ever-new interest, and always writes for the fullest particulars to be sent to her about the latest little stranger, of whose size, complexion, and attractions she loves to hear.

HER Imperial Highness the Grand Duchess Marie Alexandrovna (Duchess of Coburg) takes high precedence in Russia, and had an outfit of the most magnificent State garments for the occasions in connection with the coronation. The Duchess, as a Russian Princess of the Blood Royal, wears the National Court dress, which is much like ours, save that the bodices are cut right off the shoulders and that there are long hanging sleeves. The State trains are longer and narrower, and the ordinary trains are cut in one with the bodices, are nearly as long as our Court trains, and are round.

THE Czar at his Coronation was escorted by a truly remarkable cavalcade, composed of not less than sixty royalties. Of all the carriages which figured in the Coronation procession, modern and ancient, with their beautiful paintings by Boucher, Gravelot, and Watteau—forming a collection not to be seen in any other part of the world—none was more artistic, more beautiful, or so rich in appearance as the two-seated carriage in which the Czarina drove. This carriage was sent by the Prussian King Frederick the Great to the Empress Elizabeth Petrovna, in 1746. The body of the coach is adorned with fine carving on the door panels, and medallion formed of precious stones, having in the centre the Imperial coat of arms in diamonds. On the top is the Imperial Crown inlaid with precious stones; at the four corners the Imperial Eagle in gold.

STATISTICS.

The earth whirls through space at the rate of about 19 miles per second.

Over 130,000 canaries are sent every year to the United States and Canada from the Hartz Mountains, Prussia.

SIZE for size, a thread of spider's silk is decidedly tougher than a bar of steel. An ordinary thread will bear a weight of 3gr. This is about 50 per cent. stronger than a steel thread of the same thickness.

GEMS.

Men of earnest thought and quiet contemplation exercise a wonderful influence over men of action.

EVERY human being is intended to have a character of his own, to be what no other is, and to do what no other can.

THE shadows of the mind are like those of the body. In the morning of life they all lie behind us; at noon we trample them under foot; and in the evening they stretch long, broad, and deepening before us.

In our keen look at the strong, outward practicalities of life, do not let us forget its inmost secret of power; that all noble thoughts, all noble possibilities of life, spring out of this love, or touch their finest meaning in it; that there is no factor like it in the makeup of the world.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

RECIPE FOR EXCELLENT FURNITURE POLISH.—Three ounces bees-wax, one ounce white-wax, one ounce Sunlight Soap, one pint turpentine, one pint soft water. Mix thoroughly and keep for two days before using, apply a little lightly, and polish it off with silk handkerchief.

MAPLE SUGAR SAUCE.—Break half a pound of maple sugar in small bits, put it into a saucepan, with half a gill of cold water, set the saucepan over the fire and melt the sugar until it forms a clear syrup. Then remove it from the fire and stir in two heaping teaspoonsful of butter cut in small bits. Serve the sauce hot with any fruit pudding.

PARSNIPS WITH CREAM.—Scrape three large parsnips, slice them half an inch thick and two inches long, and boil them in salted boiling water until they are tender. Then drain off the water, add two tablespoonfuls of butter and half a cupful of cream; season them palpably with white pepper and salt, let them boil once, and then serve.

SELF-RAISING MUFFINS.—One half pint milk, one half pint water, one heaping pint flour. Stir the liquid slowly into the flour to prevent its getting lumpy. Beat up well, and then put it into gem pans, which must be well greased and smoking hot, on top of the stove. Put the batter in with a large spoon, put rapidly into a quick oven and bake fifteen or twenty minutes. They must be browned and served very hot.

LEMON JELLY.—One package of good gelatine, one cup of sugar, granulated, three lemons, two sticks of cinnamon, three pints of water. Soak the gelatine in a cup of the cold water, heat the remainder to boiling, then put in gelatine and sugar, stir until dissolved, drop in cinnamon, and strain in lemon juice. Take half a cup of granulated sugar, place in a saucepan, with about a tablespoonful of cold water, and let it boil until a rich amber colour, then stir in with the other liquid while hot, or it will candy. Strain all through a flannel bag, and put in moulds on the ice.

MISCELLANEOUS.

A PARADE sacred fire which is burning in a temple at Leigigul, Persia, is known to have not been extinguished since the days of Raptureth, who lived twelve centuries ago.

In Queensland, Australia, there are sections of land hundreds of miles in extent which have been devastated by rabbits. The ground is white with the bones of dead rabbits.

THE WAX palm-tree of South America, which grows at an altitude of ten thousand feet above sea-level, is completely covered with a coating which consists of a vegetable wax and crystalline resin. When mixed with tallow this substance is made into candles.

THIS year the potato celebrates the three hundredth anniversary of its introduction into England. In 1586 Sir Walter Raleigh first brought potatoes from America to England, and for some time they were a luxury of the rich alone, costing two shillings per pound.

A CURIOUS lake has been found on the island of Kildin, North Sea, which contains salt-water under the surface, in which sponges, codfish, and other marine animals flourish. The surface of the water, however, is perfectly fresh, and supports fresh-water creatures and vegetation.

THE Chinese send three invitations to the guests whom they desire to see at their great feasts. The first is despatched two days before the feast; the second on the day itself, in order to remind those they have invited of their engagement; and the third just before the hour has arrived, so as to show how impatient they are to see their friends.

In some parts of Germany boxes are placed in the cafés for the ends of cigars cut off by smokers, and these are collected and sold each Christmas on behalf of the funds of a society established for the purpose of supplying new clothing to poor children. The sum thus realized in one year amounts to something like sixty thousand dollars.

A TEA-PLANT is picked as the successive "flushes" occur. A "flush" of the plant is the throwing out of new shoots and leaves, the latter forming the tea of commerce. The average "flushing" period is from seven to nine months, and the intervals vary from seven to fourteen days. The number of "flushes" range, from eighteen where no manure is used to twenty-five in good soil.

A BICYCLE saddle with a rest for the back is one of the latest patents of a manufacturer of bicycle fittings. The advantages claimed for this saddle are that the back-rest may be fastened to remain in a certain position, but it will automatically collapse as soon as the rider rises from the saddle. Thus it will not be in the way if the rider wishes to dismount backward from the saddle. Hygienically the back-rest is a great improvement upon saddles for the bicycle.

PNEUMATIC tubes have many uses, but one of the latest is attracting a great deal of attention from its novelty. This is a tube for stacking straw. It is built in sections, and is controlled by metal straps, pivot and arms. The straw is drawn into the tube, carried through it with great velocity, and by a turn-table and swinging arrangement like a crane is evenly distributed on the stack. The angles can be changed at will, and the whole machine is practical and manageable.

A BABY alarm, or means by which the crying of an infant which has been left asleep in a distant room may be signalled, is one of the recent booms offered by science. A sensitive microphone, connected to a battery and to the primary of an induction coil, is placed near the child's cot. The secondary of the coil is connected by two wires to a small electro-magnet at the place where the alarm is to be given, and on the crying of the child the microphone sets up an undulatory current in this circuit, causing the electro-magnet to deflect a delicate steel balance and close an electric-bell circuit.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

J. H. K.—You are liable for the year.

MISSOURI.—Better consult a solicitor.

WE WISH.—Coconut or other thick matting.

CARR.—A veterinary surgeon would prescribe for him.

A. K. N.—The agreement is binding if in proper form.

MYSTIC.—The papers have probably been lost. We cannot advise you.

H. M. R.—We recommend you to see a solicitor before taking proceedings.

ANXIOUS FOR ADVICE.—If not absolutely necessary, it is highly desirable.

CATCHOU.—Inquire at Somerset House, or local registry, and get forms.

A STRANGER.—Address Right Hon. J. Chamberlain, Colonial Office, London.

WILKINSON.—Apply to the party who did it and get them to set it right.

WORKING MAN.—The largest manufacturing town in Great Britain is Glasgow.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—It is best—and cheapest—in the long run—to see a solicitor.

WORRIED ONE.—You cannot recover against the boy's parents or the School Board.

AN ADMIRING READER.—Your ears should be syringed, but let it be done by a competent hand.

JACK'S OWN LOVE.—You must tell us something more about your habits before we can suggest.

WHITE PATCH.—There is no accounting for the sudden whitening of hair, in patches, upon the face and head.

DAISY.—Impossible to evenly whiten it all over without injuring the fabric. It never would become a good colour.

W. A. R. C.—All artists should understand how to mix colours, and the best way to do this is by trying all sorts of mixtures.

MUSICA.—Familiarity with a variety of musical instruments is of very great advantage to one who makes a profession.

BLUERIDGE.—There is nothing that could be applied to the face to assist the growth of the hair which would not actually injure the skin.

WEAKY ONE.—The way to get employment is to apply for it, and be ready to show what you can do, in case you should get an opportunity to do so.

DESPERATION.—Such a course is dishonourable in the extreme, and whatever the motive may be, is beneath the dignity of a well-bred and honourable man.

QUEEN MAR.—One may only receive very intimate friends in a tea-gown—that is, any garment of a tea-gown that suggests negligee or morning-dress.

MADELINE.—We advise you to have the velvet cleaned at the dyers, it would cost you less for a small thing such as you describe, and be far better done by them.

AWKWARD ANNIE.—It is very easy for one to get instruction in needlework, and every young woman should do her best to excel in this strictly feminine art.

W. U. G.—You cannot wash off the stuff put on with the brush without taking off the gilding under it, and in any case only the very best gilding will bear cleaning satisfactorily.

M. N.—A girl seventeen may wear her hair in a rather loose knot at the back of her head or in a braid tied with a ribbon, if she is small for her age and looks young.

H. O.—The Gregorian calendar makes every year which is divisible by four without a remainder a leap year, except the centesimal years, which are only leap years when the first two figures are divisible by four.

CURIOSITY.—The origin of the halfpenny and farthing was in the time of William the Conqueror. When he began to reign the penny was cast with a deep cross, so that it might be broken in half, as a halfpenny, or in quarters for fourthings, or farthings as we now call them.

F. N. B.—Your scruples are well-grounded. It would be foolish of you to marry until you have a larger salary. A marriage entails a family and much expense. When poverty comes in at the door, love often dies out of the window. Endeavour to practise patience for awhile, and you will enjoy married bliss all the more for it.

X. Y. Z.—1. Usually so; but some words of engagement should be spoken at the time. 2. Give him a present of a nice cigar-case if he smokes, or work him a pair of slippers. 3. It might cause delay, but need not be broken if the young people were true to each other. 4. Fair writing. It will develop into a running hand with care.

SPRING CLEAN.—If the gilding is really "good" it may be cleaned and brightened by going lightly over it with a camel's hair brush, which should be dipped from time to time in warm spirits of wine. We should advise you to practise at first on your least valuable frames. To make them look really well you should have them regilt by a professional gilder.

AN OLD ADMIRER.—Make a fairly rich crust, either puff paste or short, roll it out thinly to the size of a pudding plate. Brush it over with beaten egg, dust it well with sugar, and bake in a quick oven. Warm your knife, cut the galette into nicely shaped pieces, and serve either hot or cold.

G. H.—The most sensible course is to make up your mind that love that is not freely given will never freely abide. Better find out before marriage that the young lady is likely than to wake up to it afterwards. As to giving up the farm, it appears as though, having a good start, it would be folly to give it up. Why not stick to it and make a success of it?

ORNI.—The Simplon is a pass over the Alps, celebrated for the military road built by Napoleon, which connects Geneva with Milan. It was an immense work, the road being forty-two miles long, thirty feet wide, and containing several long tunnels, six hundred and eleven bridges, and sixteen houses of refuge. Next after the Brunner pass it was the first carriage road over the Alps. The highest point in the road is 6,315 feet above the sea. Close to this point a house has been erected, where travellers receive free accommodation.

MARSH.—Take one quart of milk, two cupfuls of bread crumbs, four eggs, scant one half cupful of lard and butter, one cupful of white sugar, one large lemon, juice and half the rind, grated. Soak the bread in the milk; add the beaten yolks, with the lard and butter and sugar rubbed to a cream; add the lemon or orange. Bake in a greased dish until firm and slightly brown. While still in the oven, cover with a marquise of the whites whipped to a froth, and three tablespoonsfuls of powdered sugar and a little lemon or orange juice. Brown very lightly. Eat cold.

INTO THE GARDEN.

INTO THE GARDEN, where the flowers bloom'd,
My lady walked when the day was fair,
Sweet was the smile she gave in passing,
And sunny the gold of her burnished hair.
Into the garden and out of the garden,
She passed swiftly with eager feet,
And the roses whispered to one another,
"My lady goes forth her love to greet."

INTO THE GARDEN where the flowers bloom'd,
She wandered again when the day grew old,
But never a smile she gave in passing,
For her eyes were dim and her heart was cold,
Into the garden and out of the garden,
She passed slowly with weary tread,
And the violets murmured to one another,
"Her heart is broken, for her lover lies dead."

INTO THE GARDEN where the flowers bloom'd,
They carried her forth when the day was fair;
Pale was her face, but her lips were smiling,
And the sunbeams kissed her golden hair.
Into the garden and out of the garden,
They carried her silently with reverent tread,
And the lilies sighed as they told each other,
"Our lady lies cold and white and dead."

M. M. S.

A LOVELY LASS.—We are sorry we cannot tell you the latest time for posting letters in your town to catch the mail for Rio de Janeiro. It takes about eighteen days for a letter to reach there. We are glad to know that you derive so much pleasure from reading our paper.

CURIOSITY.—Get a large galvanized iron pall, bore a hole of quarter to half inch diameter in the bottom of it; round this have a piece of tin one and a half inch soldered to form a spout for directing the course of the water; then place about two quarts of well-washed small stones in the bottom of the pall to form a drain; in these lay a piece of bat cloth, a thick flannel as wide as the pall, or this again put a layer of three or four inches of animal charcoal then another piece of hair-cloth or flannel, then three inches of clean fine sand, one more bat cloth or flannel, and finally two or three inches of fine stones.

FOLLY.—Wall paper can be cleaned with stale bread—that is, bread about two days old. Cut it into pieces convenient to hold, and after having blown off all the dust from the paper to be cleaned, by means of a good pair of bellows, take the crust in the hand, and wipe lightly downward with the crust side about half a yard at a time. Be sure not to rub the cross or horizontal way. This process has been known to result in making old paper look almost equal to new; but the operation must be very slowly performed. Remember to cut away carefully the dirty part of the bread, and use the clean pieces as soon as it is necessary to do so, and do not rub the paper hard.

YANKEE.—Take a heaping cupful of butter, two of sugar, one of milk, four generous cupfuls of flour, five eggs, one gill of brandy, two nutmegs, half a teaspoonful of soda, and one quart of boiled raisins. Put the raisins in a small stewpan, and cover them with cold water. Cook slowly for half an hour; then drain and cool. Beat the butter to a cream. Beat the sugar into it; add the brandy and nutmeg, and beat a little longer. Add the yolks of the eggs, well beaten. Dissolve the soda in the milk, and add this to the beaten ingredients; then add the flour. Stir in the well-beaten whites of the eggs. Spread the batter in thin layers in two large cake pans, and sprinkle raisins on each layer. Continue until the materials are all used. Bake for two hours in a moderate oven.

CONSTANT READER.—Parc and cut a medium-sized carrot, a beet, and a turnip, also two small onions; slice three quarts of tomatoes; boil the whole one hour in three quarts of good beef stock and strain through a colander. Heat five ounces of butter in a pan, until it becomes a light brown; take it from the fire, and while hot sift in four tablespoonsfuls of flour; mix well, add a pint of hot soup, and then pour the whole in the soup-kettle; season with pepper, salt, and a dessert spoonful of sugar; place it on the fire and stir it until it boils; boil and skim it five minutes.

H. I. T.—If braided you must undo the braid and loosen all, save the tie at the thick end, then put the yolks of two or three fresh eggs into a basin, and rub that well into the hair. When the yolk has been thoroughly applied add about half a pint of barely tepid water, and with this addition continue the washing; in a little time add another half pint of water, still washing. It should then be cleaned; if so, squeeze out. Throw away the egg water, and with plenty of clean tepid water, in which a little powdered borax should be dissolved, rinse out every trace of the egg, dry, brush, and rebind.

SUG.—Heat some milk almost to boiling, and beat three eggs, the white and yolks separately; to the yolks add one and one half cupfuls of sugar; beat well together with a little of the hot milk; keep the remainder of the milk over the fire, and beat the sugar and yolks into it a little at a time; have ready the whites, beaten stiff, and pour them in, stirring constantly; let this cook until it is about as thick as boiled custard, then take instantly from the fire, and when cool add one quart of milk or cream and three tablespoonsfuls of vanilla; freeze; boil the cream in a pan set within a pot of boiling water. You may put lemon in place of the vanilla extract.

R. F. T.—1. Historians do not agree concerning the manner of the death of Cyrus the elder, founder of the Persian empire. Xenophon makes him die in peace and in his bed; but Arius attributes to him in his latter years an invasion of India in which he was killed on the field. Herodotus says he made an attack upon the Massagetae, northern nomads ruled by a queen, Tomiris, and greatly resembling the Scythians, in whose country he was defeated and slain in a bloody battle. There is said to be, however, some proof that wherever he died he was buried in his native province, and that his tomb still exists at Murgab. 2. No charge is made for answering questions.

G. E. L.—1. To make raspberry wine, take ripe raspberries, and after husking and bruising them, strain through a canvas bag. Boil the juice, and to every gallon add a pound and a half of lump sugar, three or four whites of egg, and let the whole boil a quarter of an hour, skimming away the froth as it arises. When cool let it set, pour into a cask and add enough yeast to make it ferment. When fermentation has taken place, add a pint of white wine to each gallon, and suspend in it an ounce of bruised mace in a bag. It will be ready for use in about a month. 2. Orange Marmalade: Peel about two dozen Seville oranges, cut them in halves, squeeze the juice from them into a basin, and put it in a cool place. Then boil the oranges, remove the pips and beat them up in a mortar with an equal weight of sugar. Boil again till they are ready to candy, then put in with them the juice and peel cut in pieces, together with their weight of sugar, and boil briskly until reduced to the consistency of jelly.

R. T. H.—Neglect of the teeth in childhood is a most cruel hardship which parents should on no account inflict on their little ones. Better let children grow up devoid of a single accomplishment than allow them to lose their teeth from avoidable causes for the want of a little reasonable carelessness. The defects resulting from other errors can be remedied. For example, although youth is the time for learning information can be acquired later on in life when the earlier years have been neglected; but there is no place of reparation for the crime of neglecting the teeth. If they are allowed to grow badly or to rot away in childhood there is nothing for it but to have recourse to the dentist for the supply of those substitutes which science has succeeded in devising for the aid of the impoverished and of the absolute destitute alike. Obvious as these facts may seem to be, there can be no doubt that children's teeth are very commonly left un-cared for even by the kindest hearted of parents. The reason of this neglect is not far to seek—the value of a good and full set of teeth is not properly understood. It is not realised that without these organs of mastication a healthy or vigorous life is altogether impossible, and it is not perceived that a host of common causes combine to render the survival of a really good set of teeth through youth to manhood so unlikely as to be almost a marvel.

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